

THE COURT JESTER



CORNELIA BAKER

152D

70

UNIV. OF CALIF. LIBRARY, LOS ANGELES

THE COURT JESTER



"I am Marguerite of Hapsburg!"

Page 51

THE COURT JESTER

By

CORNELIA BAKER

Author of

The Queen's Page
Young People in Old Places, etc.

With Illustrations by

MARGARET ELY WEBB

and

MARGARET H. DEVENEAU

INDIANAPOLIS

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

COPYRIGHT 1906
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

SEPTEMBER

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOKBINDERS AND PRINTERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

DEDICATED TO MY
DEAR EUGENIA F. F.

2128750

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I LE GLORIEUX HEARS GOOD NEWS	1
II A FESTIVAL AT THE INN	13
III AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING	33
IV BROKEN PROMISES	61
V THE WONDERFUL WISDOM OF PITTACUS	76
VI LADY CLOTILDE'S MOONSTONE PENDANT	98
VII A PLEASANT SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS	124
VIII A ROYAL ALCHEMIST	153
IX PHILIBERT IN DANGER	167
X A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE	194
XI THE LADY MARGUERITE IS VERY BRAVE	214
XII AN AUSTRIAN PRINCESS AT THE SPANISH COURT	230
XIII TRIPPING THE MEASURES OF THE EGG-DANCE	249



THE COURT JESTER

THE COURT JESTER

CHAPTER I

LE GLORIEUX HEARS GOOD NEWS

The old duchess was talking of the past, while behind her chair Le Glorieux was silently and joyously turning handsprings. I wish I might give him another name, for that one is certainly a mouthful, but as he really lived, and that was what he was called, we must manage it as best we can.

You may think, and with reason, that turning handsprings was not a respectful thing to do when a lady, and above all a duchess, was talking. But Le Glorieux was the court jester, the fool, who when Charles the Bold, son of the duchess, was living, was wont to make his master laugh. Therefore his conduct and conversation as a rule were not what one could expect of a sedate and dignified member of society.

In the presence of his late master, Le Glorieux could have turned handsprings in plain view, but the dowager duchess was old and querulous and resented such performances. She was the widow of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, and she looked very much like a fairy godmother in her

THE COURT JESTER

quaint costume of the time of Charles the Seventh. She had been lady in waiting at the court of the French king, and she still clung to the high head-dress, towering some twenty inches above her brow, and its long veil, which seemed to be boiling in filmy folds, like foam, from its pointed top. By her side was an ebony crutch, not for the purpose of turning pumpkins into coaches for the convenience of neglected Cinderellas, but to support the weight of the owner when she cared to move about; for rheumatism, which was up and doing even so long ago as the fifteenth century, had no more respect for a duchess than for a scullery maid, and had spitefully attacked her Grace of Burgundy.

The windows were veiled by heavy curtains that excluded the sunshine, and the only light in the long dim room came from the brazier at the feet of the duchess, who required artificial heat even in this warm autumn weather. Outside—Le Glorieux knew—the birds were singing and the butterflies were dipping in and out among the roses nodding in the soft breeze; but to-day the beauties of nature did not attract him so strongly as did the unusual degree of excitement going on in the castle. The Lady Clotilde had been sent for by her cousin, the young Duchess Anne of Brittany, and so, bag and baggage and servants, she was to set out on the following morning. Throughout the castle was felt the buzz and bustle

LE GLORIEUX HEARS GOOD NEWS

of preparation, maids running in and out, and pages spinning up and down the staircases, for the Lady Clotilde liked to keep everybody busy. Le Glorieux longed to see what was going on, for, though a grown man, he possessed the heart of a rollicking boy and was highly entertained by a hubbub.

There had been plenty of diversion while Charles the Bold was living, a fact of which you will be convinced when you read your history of France, and he had once taken Le Glorieux with him to the wars, where the latter had shown himself to be brave and fearless, and when Charles was not planning campaigns against the neighboring countries, or engaged in carrying out his plans, he liked, while sipping the red or the white wine of his province, to listen to the drolleries of his jester. In those days, you see, there were no newspapers, no printed jokes, and it was necessary for even a fierce and warlike duke to laugh at times. But after the duke's death nobody cared much for the jester's jokes, and his principal duty seemed to be to listen to the dowager duchess talk, and as she was in the habit of repeating the same story a good many times a day, her conversation was usually extremely wearisome.

"Yes," said she, holding her wax-like hands out to the brazier and rubbing them thoughtfully, "I remember it as well as if it had happened yesterday. I do not know whether I ever mentioned to

THE COURT JESTER

you, Le Glorieux, that I was lady in waiting to her Highness, Marguerite of Scotland, then Dauphiness of France?"

With the agility of a cat the jester, who at this moment was standing on his head, regained his feet and stood respectfully before her Grace. "Never, Cousin," replied he gravely; "or at least not more than five thousand times."

"I thought not," she returned, for being somewhat deaf she had not caught the latter part of the sentence. "Yes, I was in the train of that dear and beauteous lady whom I loved so much that I still wear the costume chosen by her, this cap and veil and these shoes."

The old lady thrust out a foot shod in a shoe having a sharp point as long again as her foot, remarking contentedly, "This is a fine style of a shoe, do you not think so, Le Glorieux?"

"Yes, Cousin, and one calculated to encourage an ambitious great toe that is anxious to keep on growing," replied the fool, whose own shoes were pointed, but in a style far less exaggerated than those of her Grace.

"As I was saying," she went on, "I remember it as well as if it had happened yesterday. The dauphiness was fond of learning, and she composed verses of no small merit. I too caught the contagion and composed verses. I wish that I could remember some of them to repeat to you."

"Do not trouble yourself, Cousin," said the



“I remember it well”

Page 3

LE GLORIEUX HEARS GOOD NEWS

jester hastily; "I am nothing but a fool, you know, and I must deny myself many pleasures."

"At the court," she resumed, "lived at the time the great poet Alain Chartier, who was a wonderfully gifted man, though very plain. One day when the dauphiness and her ladies—I was among them, Le Glorieux—were crossing the courtyard we found Alain Chartier asleep on a bench. Much to our surprise her Highness gathered up her long train so that its rustle would not awaken him, and tripping softly toward the sleeping poet she kissed him on the lips. Yes, Le Glorieux, that great princess consort of the dauphin—afterward Louis the Eleventh—deigned to kiss a humble poet with her own lips! Was it not wonderful?"

"Not so wonderful as if she had tried to kiss him with somebody else's lips," replied the fool, adding, "but it was unfair to Chartier."

"Why unfair?"

"Because she had no right to take him unawares and unarmed."

Her Grace frowned darkly as she replied, "Le Glorieux, you are nothing but a fool and you can not understand what an honor it was for a humble poet to be kissed by a great princess. But one of the courtiers said, 'Madame, why did you kiss that extremely unprepossessing man?' The dauphiness replied, 'I did not kiss the man——'"

"How could she say that," broke in the jester, "when you all saw her do it?"

THE COURT JESTER

"Do not interrupt me, Fool. The dauphiness said, 'I did not kiss the man——'"

"That is what you said before," interrupted the fool again, "and I say she must have been a very silly little woman."

"Fool, do you not know that you are daring to criticise a princess of Scotland, daughter of James the Second of that country?"

"I do not care if she was the daughter of his present Majesty, Henry the Seventh of England; it was foolish of her to try to make people doubt the evidence of their own eyes."

"Will you let me finish, you great gawk?" Then raising her voice and speaking very rapidly the duchess went on, "The dauphiness said, 'I did not kiss the man, but that precious mouth from which has come so many noble and virtuous words.'"

"I call that a very slipshod way to get out of it," replied the fool. "Let us take an example. Suppose I had gone to the court of France and had cut off the late king's head. The soldiers arrest me and I say, 'I did not kill the man, I simply sliced off that head which has hatched up so many horrible schemes.' Would they apologize and let me go? Not a bit of it!"

"But this, you see, was figurative."

"I do not care what you call it. She kissed his lips, did she not?"

"Yes."

LE GLORIEUX HEARS GOOD NEWS

“And was not the man behind them at the time?”

“Of course, but you see——”

“Then there is nothing more to say about it,” went on the fool.

The duchess reflected seriously for a moment and then seemed to arrive at the conclusion that it would not pay her to continue the argument. Besides, she was somewhat muddled herself. She continued, “Was it a wonder that so gracious a lady should have been misunderstood at such a court? And she died mysteriously, Le Glorieux, when she was but one-and-twenty, and in her illness she said, ‘Fie upon this life; let no one talk more of it to me!’”

“I am not surprised that she felt that way,” said the jester. “Now that Louis is dead, they say that he was not cruel, but firm. For my part, I do not like the kind of firmness that wants to hang or drown half the people in the kingdom, though it may be that I am too particular.”

“Yes, I remember that day as well as if it had been yesterday,” went on the duchess, with her dull eyes fixed dreamily upon the red coals of the brazier, and the fool again glided behind her chair and resumed the handsprings.

At last, attracted in the midst of her recollections by the incessant ringing of the little bells on the jester’s cap, which his lively motions kept a-tinkle, the old lady craned her neck and glancing

THE COURT JESTER

behind her chair caught him in the very act of standing on his head!

Indignant at his inattention and forgetting the license accorded court fools, she seized her crutch and hit him a swift rap across the calves of the legs which caused him to reverse himself with a howl.

"How dare you treat me with such disrespect, and not only me, but the gracious princess of whom I was talking!" she cried angrily. "You shall leave the court. I have no need of a fool!" Then a sudden and pleasant thought seemed to come into her mind, for she said, "I know what I will do. I feel that I should send Anne of Brittany a present, and I was going to send her an emerald. I will not part with the gem; I will send you, Le Glorieux, instead, with a letter saying that I am presenting her with the most precious possession of the late Duke of Burgundy, to cheer her in the various trials brought about by the reign of one so young. Yes, that will be fine, and I shall keep the emerald. You may leave me, Fool, and prepare for your departure while I think over the wording of my letter."

Le Glorieux was so overcome with joy at this sudden and unexpected turn of affairs that he forgot his abused calves, and his feet scarce touched the steps as he mounted to his little tower chamber, for you must know that a fool was a kind of slave, and although having many privileges within the

LE GLORIEUX HEARS GOOD NEWS

palace, was not allowed to leave it even for a night without special permission.

On the landing of the staircase stood a boy of eleven or twelve years of age, looking sadly out of the mullioned window. He was a pretty youth and he wore a fine suit, to say nothing of a cap with a curling plume, but he did not look happy.

"Cheer up, Antoine," said the jester, slapping him on the back; "better days are in store for me."

"What will your better days avail me?" asked the boy, with a shrug.

"Well answered," said the jester reflectively. "Yet when things are going well with us we are surprised that the world does not smile with us, while we expect it to boohoo when we are sad. But I have been given permission to go to Brittany. Think of that! Try to overcome your indifference, and think what a joy it will be to me to live where I shall no longer hear the story of the princess who kissed the poet. And she has just hit me a blow on the legs that has raised lumps as big as plovers' eggs. Did it with her crutch, too!"

"She struck me across the shoulders with it because I could not find her needle, and she held the needle in her fingers all the time," said the page mournfully.

"Knowing her little ways, you should have looked in her fingers first," said the fool, adding blithely, "but she will never strike me again, because I am going away."

THE COURT JESTER

"You need not continually flaunt that in my face," returned the boy, in an injured tone, continuing with the mournful pleasure that many of us take in predicting misfortune for people whom we envy; "there may be worse things in store for you than to be struck by an ill-natured woman. I heard of a youth who went to a strange court with great glee and the very next day both of his ears were cut off."

"I do not think I should like a thing of that kind to happen to me," said the fool gravely. "Of course, the loss of my ears would never be noticed, because my cap covers them, but at the same time I think I should miss them myself, having always had them, you know. But I do not think you quite understand just why I am going away. Our mistress is sending me as a present, a pretty, dainty present, to the young Duchess of Brittany, and you know it would not be good taste to ill-treat a present."

"You are a strange present to send to a young lady," remarked the page sourly. "I warrant she will not be overjoyed with her packet when it meets her gaze."

"Oh, yes she will," returned Le Glorieux easily. "You see it is necessary for her to be cheered, for not only have there been frequent turmoils in her duchy, but there has been a perfect fever of excitement about her matrimonial arrangements from the day she was born. First they wanted her to

LE GLORIEUX HEARS GOOD NEWS

marry one of the little princes of England afterward smothered by his affectionate Uncle Richard; then it was the Infante of Spain, and though it now seems settled that she is to marry Maximilian of Austria, still she must be nervous and unsettled. At any rate, our mistress wants to do something gracious, and being more than a trifle close, and not wishing to send a valuable jewel, she sends me in the care of the Lady Clotilde as the most valuable jewel of her possession."

"Oh, Le Glorieux, take me with you!" pleaded Antoine, forgetting his sarcasm in his anxiety to share his friend's good fortune. "If you only will I shall be your debtor for life."

"That would be impossible, my lad. You must remain here to find her Grace's needle when she drops it, and to lead the life of a nice, tame pussy-cat."

"I will not!" cried the boy, dashing the tears from his bright eyes. "My father, who, as you know, died in battle, never intended that I should grow up thus tamely. Take me with you, oh, Le Glorieux, do!"

"I should like to," replied the jester thoughtfully. "You could ride beside me and you should fetch your lute and you could sing to me along the way to make the birds ashamed of themselves. But even if you should run away, the Lady Clotilde would not let you go with us, for you know what she is. If she were a peasant woman she would

THE COURT JESTER

be called sour and disagreeable, but being a great lady she is simply dignified and firm."

But there are times when we are enabled to get that for which we very much wish, and it so happened that the Lady Clotilde wanted the boy in her suite and begged him of the duchess, who willingly acquiesced, for caring not at all for his musical talent and his handsome face, he was no more to her than any other page.

So there were not two lighter hearts in the good duchy of Burgundy than were those of the page and the jester as they set about making their preparations for departure. They were pleased to leave the court where life had grown so monotonous, and they were delighted that they were to go in each other's company, for though there was a difference of some fifteen years in their respective ages, Le Glorieux and Antoine were very fond of each other.

CHAPTER II

A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

The following morning bright and early the procession rode briskly out of the castle courtyard. The Lady Clotilde traveled in her litter and was attended by her maids and her men-servants and her guards on mules, the guards being necessary, for it was dangerous for those possessing money and jewels to travel unless they were protected from the outlaws who infested mountain and forest.

At the rear of the company rode Le Glorieux on a steed he always preferred when riding abroad. This was a donkey which the fool had named Pit-tacus after one of the seven wise men of Greece, for he declared the little animal was very wise, though no one as yet had discovered the fact. On the jester's wrist was perched Pandora, his hawk, for he vowed that no man with a proper degree of self-respect would be seen in public without his hawk, which was true, the fashion of the time having so decreed. Pandora wore a cunning little red leather hood with some bells attached to it, and, to keep her from escaping from him, a cord attached to her leg was fastened to the jester's arm.

Antoine, whose lute was slung to his shoulder by a blue ribband, was mounted upon a small gray

THE COURT JESTER

mule and rode beside his comrade, the two whistling and singing and making so merry together that more than once the Lady Clotilde put her head out between the curtains of her litter and, with a very severe face and a harsh voice, bade them be quiet.

History tells us that Edward the Second of England had a jester who amused his royal master simply by riding before him and frequently falling off his horse, so it is no wonder that a boy of the age of Antoine should have been kept in a continuous state of merriment caused by the antics of his friend. You doubtless have been to the circus, and you know what a very funny fellow a clown can be, and how the boys and girls in the audience are inclined to laugh every time he opens his mouth, and how even the grown people are not ashamed to smile at his drolleries. Then imagine the bliss experienced by Antoine in riding with a real clown who performed, not because he was expected to do so and was paid for it, but because he was anxious to have a good time.

Sometimes the jester rode with his face toward the donkey's tail, at others he lay flat on the animal's back, to the intense indignation of Pittacus and Pandora, neither of whom could appreciate that sort of thing. Then sometimes the boy and the fool broke into song together, and if the birds were not exactly "ashamed of themselves," as Le Glorieux had predicted they would be, they must have been very much astonished, to say the least.



They stopped at an old inn

A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

This mode of travel was not so swift as one may find in France to-day, but it had its advantages, for the scenery could be more thoroughly enjoyed when every bird and every flower could be leisurely surveyed instead of passing the car window like a flash, leaving upon the mind no impression whatever.

After a journey of some days they entered Brittany, and stopped at nightfall at an old inn situated on a cliff above the Loire, which smoothly ripples its way to the Bay of Biscay.

The arrival of the Lady Clotilde and her party created a certain degree of agitation throughout the inn, for an empress could not have been more exacting in her demands than this lady, who always seemed to think that she was created first and the rest of the world added as an afterthought.

Soon afterward there came a middle-aged woman and a little girl apparently of about twelve years of age, who caused no commotion whatever, for they were unattended and plainly clad. The Lady Clotilde, looking out of her window, pronounced the woman to be an ordinary person, and, supposing the little girl to be the woman's child, did not waste even a glance upon her, but began to give quick, sharp commands regarding her own supper, which was brought to her hot and fragrant with appetizing odors, and with which, strange to say, she found no fault.

But in the great kitchen of the inn that night

THE COURT JESTER

there was a joyful celebration. The innkeeper's baby daughter had been christened that day and this was the feast which followed it. Mine host had invited Le Glorieux and Antoine to join him and his friends in the celebration of the occasion, and, after the guests of the house had been served, a long table, uncovered and made of rough unplanned wood, was spread with all the good things the hostelry afforded. There was roast pig stuffed with chopped meat and aromatic herbs, and there were meat pasties and ragouts, to say nothing of sugared cakes and various other dainties. There was no coffee, for that was about a hundred and fifty years before that now popular beverage was used in Europe, but there was the wine of the country, which, being pure and honestly made, was less dangerous than the wine of to-day. Another feature was lacking which now is so familiar: the air at the close of the meal was not contaminated with the odor of pipes and cigars, for Sir Walter Raleigh, who brought tobacco from savagery to civilization, was not even born, and the mainland of the New World was still waiting for Columbus.

Le Glorieux in his fantastic costume of striped yellow and green, and his queer cap with its points sticking out on either side and adorned with bells, was an object of much interest, for it was the first time these people had ever seen such a costume. To-day the portraits of the celebrated people of

A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

the world are familiar to all who have pennies to invest in newspapers, and had there been at that time the same facilities for spreading the news that there are to-day, Le Glorieux, with his sayings and doings, particularly in the campaign with his late master, would have been written up again and again, and the public, you may be sure, would have known his face as well as those of its own father and mother.

The innkeeper, his family, and friends all wore what to us would seem like comic opera costumes: mine host, fat and rosy, wore his holiday suit of a gorgeous color, and all the men were similarly attired, while the women wore pink, or blue, or green bodices with short skirts of a different color. On their heads they wore flat white linen caps fitting close, and with tails to them like mantles floating down their backs, the costume being completed by a high collar flaring out from the shoulders.

The fairest of the women was the pale, pretty young mother, who cast many proud glances at the rude wooden cradle in the corner where lay the real heroine of the occasion, and, to her, the most important person in the company.

Considered the most distinguished of the guests, Le Glorieux was given a seat at the head of the table, where he immediately began to make himself at home, not only with the viands, but with the company, keeping up a continuous chatter and convulsing his audience with his merry jokes.

THE COURT JESTER

"I should like to know the name of the woman who came shortly after our arrival," he said after a while, turning to his host, who replied, "I do not know her name; her garb is plain, yet she seems to be one who is accustomed to the best of everything, for she insisted upon having two of my largest rooms for herself and the child, showing that she had the means to pay for them. She is on her way to the shrine of Saint Roch in the forest beyond, to be relieved of a migraine that torments her morning, noon, and night."

"And the blessed Saint Roch will cure her," said the innkeeper's mother confidently; "no one goes in pain from his shrine."

Le Glorieux had noticed the shrine as they came along. The good saint, who is supposed to lend a kindly hearing to those who are suffering from physical ailments, was carved in rock above a clear spring. He was represented as a young man with his robe lifted to show a plague spot on his leg, and by his side was the dog which brought bread to him when he was starving. When the readers of this story travel abroad they will see pictures of Saint Roch painted by Rubens, Guido, Tintoretto, and other great masters.

"I have heard my mother say that when the plague was in many parts of Europe it never came near Brittany because of Saint Roch," remarked a young woman.

"I should think not," observed Le Glorieux;

A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

"curing the plague is what he prides himself upon, and it is not reasonable to suppose that he would allow it to rage under his very nose."

"From the tinkle of your bells," said a foppish young man at the jester's left, a youth who had grown a little envious of the attention paid to Le Glorieux, "I should say that you are a fool."

"And from the tinkle of your tongue, I have been suspecting the same thing of you," retorted the other quickly.

"No man may say that of me!" said the foppish youth, springing to his feet and drawing his dagger from its sheath, while the jester drew his sword.

"Shame upon you, Nicole, to begin a brawl upon such an occasion," said the innkeeper, rising and putting his hand upon his friend's arm, while some of the women gave little shrieks of fear, though at this period the clash of swords and daggers was not an unusual sound, and such a scene was liable to happen in almost any company.

"Our host is right," said Le Glorieux, replacing his sword in its sheath with a decided clank. "Such a fray is not only disrespectful to the ladies, but it will give an opportunity for that lovely pig to get cold before we have a chance to finish it. I will just say, however, that if this young man is anxious to fight me I am ready to meet him in some quiet spot at any moment that may be convenient to him." And the jester resumed his seat at the table.

THE COURT JESTER

"The woman who came to-day is not the mother of that child," remarked the innkeeper, anxious to change the subject.

"Did she tell you so?" asked his mother.

"No, but I have eyes. The woman is of the ordinary walks of life, a German, I should say, while the little girl is an aristocrat, and if I am not very much mistaken she is French."

"But she is clothed no better than the woman," argued his mother. "An aristocrat would not travel without attendants and dress in such poor style, and——"

An exclamation from some one on the opposite side of the table arrested her words, for standing in the doorway was the child of whom they were speaking. She was a pretty little maiden with large blue eyes, whose long lashes made them appear black, and her hair, which hung in half curling masses below her waist, was of a reddish gold. She was dressed in a dark blue gown of coarse woolen material, with a close-fitting cap of the same. She seemed not at all abashed at thus entering where she had not been invited, saying in a clear sweet voice, "May I stay here for a while? Cunegunda put me to bed and then retired herself, for she is so tormented by migraine that she did not sit by me for a time, as she usually does. I could not sleep on account of all this racket, so I dressed myself and came down and would like to remain for a little while, if I may."

A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

"I am sorry we disturbed your rest, my little lady," replied the innkeeper respectfully. "I will change your room, if you wish."

"No," said the little girl, "I do not want you to do that. I am going to stay up as long as you do if you will let me. I want to see what this kind of an entertainment is like."

"Then I will make a place at the table," returned he.

"Thank you, no," she returned, with dignity. "I have had all that I require. I will just sit here by the window and look on."

"That you may and welcome," said the innkeeper heartily, "and in order that you may do so to the greatest advantage, I am going to place you here," and lifting her lightly he placed her on the deep window seat, which was some distance from the floor. "And now you may not only look at us, but at this pretty bird as well."

The casement of the window, which swung like a door, was opened on the inside, and perched on top of it where her master had placed her, sulkily ruffling her feathers as though strongly disapproving of her surroundings, was Pandora.

"You have never been so close to a fine hooded bird before, I warrant," said the innkeeper.

"I have birds of my own, and they are all hooded," replied the child indifferently.

The people seated at the table glanced significantly at each other as if to ask, "Is she bragging,

THE COURT JESTER

or is she of a higher rank than she pretends to be?" for middle-class folk did not possess hooded birds.

"To whom does this one belong?" asked the child.

"To that gentleman seated at the head of the table," was the reply.

She looked at him thoughtfully and then at the bird. "I wonder how a hawk likes belonging to a fool," she said.

Everybody laughed, Le Glorieux loudest of all. "No matter how wise a fool may appear, his cap and bells will always betray him," he said. "Yes, my friends, as you no doubt have suspected, I am a court jester. I belonged to Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy, and now I am being sent as a present to her Grace, the young Duchess of Brittany."

"I have suspected your identity all along," said a fat friar seated at the other end of the table. "I was at Beauvais during the siege and I heard of you there. You are Le Glorieux."

The jester rose and made an extravagant bow. "At your service," said he. "Yes," he continued, taking his place again, "I was at the siege of Beauvais. I saw the young maid Jeanne Fourquet, in imitation of the Maid of Orleans, fight like a witch with her little ax, for which she was named Jeanne Hachette, and when a tall Burgundian was scaling the walls and was planting

A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

his banner, she pushed him over into the ditch and waving her flag shouted, 'Victory!' I am not boring anybody by talking about the past, am I?" asked the fool suddenly.

"On the contrary," said the host, "it is more interesting than a tale of gnomes and pixies."

"You see," explained Le Glorieux, "I have lived so long at court, where the past is raked out and talked over and over, that I am afraid to relate anything that happened longer ago than the day before yesterday."

"If it please you, continue," said one of the company. "We are humble folk living in a quiet village, and we know but little of what happens in the great world outside."

So Le Glorieux continued, keeping the company chilled with awe or shaking with laughter, according to the nature of the incident he happened to be relating. It may be that some of the incidents he related never occurred outside of his own brain, but one at least of his anecdotes may be found in history.

"It was after the siege of Beauvais," said he, "that Cousin Charles came nearer to giving me a cuff on the jaw than ever happened before or afterward. He was quite boastful, was Charles, and with considerable pomp he was conducting some ambassadors through the arsenal. He stopped short in one of the rooms and swelling himself up said, 'This room contains the keys of all the cities

THE COURT JESTER

of France.' Then I began to fumble in my pockets and to search all over the room. 'Now, donkey, for what are you looking so anxiously?' asked he. I replied, 'I am looking for the key of Beauvais,' and that made him turn as red as your doublet, mine host, for we had not been victorious at Beauvais."

"But you were very brave there, although a mere youth," remarked the friar, "and I should advise our young friend here to think twice before he meets you out, as you have invited him to do."

"Oh, we will let that pass, if he is willing," said Le Glorieux good-naturedly, an arrangement with which the young man, who was not especially brave, was very glad to agree.

"And now," said the jester, "I am reminded that there is one thing that I have forgotten, and that is to ask the name that you have given to that blessed baby."

"That you will be glad to hear," said the host, rubbing his hands delightedly. "The good wife too is a Burgundian, and nothing would do but that we should name the little one for the Duchess Mary. Heaven rest her soul!" he continued reverently.

It happened that this was the one theme that could render Le Glorieux sad. He had worshiped the young Duchess Mary, who had ruled the province after the death of her father, Charles the Bold—worshiped her as a faithful dog loves his

A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

kind mistress. He had seen her betrothed at Ghent to the Archduke Maximilian of Austria, also styled King of the Romans, and when a few years later news had come of her death, caused by a fall from her horse, the jester had known the first real grief of his life.

"Yes," said the mother of the baby. "Her name is Mary, and may she be as good and beautiful as the poor young duchess, cut off in the bloom of her life."

The jester rose, and going to the cradle took in his own the little baby hand curled like a crumpled rose-leaf. "Mary, namesake of an angel, I salute you," said he, pressing the tiny fingers to his lips.

"No matter how well the children of the poor young duchess are cared for, they will miss the love of their mother, for there is nothing like it," said the innkeeper's wife. "One of them, the Lady Marguerite of Hapsburg, is to be Queen of France," she added proudly.

"I was so fortunate as to witness that betrothal," said the friar, helping himself to another piece of the pasty.

"You did!" cried Le Glorieux. "I would give a year of my life to see Mary's little child. Tell us about it, good friar."

The child in the window, who had at first sat carelessly swinging her little feet, had now drawn them up to the sill, and turning sidewise and with

THE COURT JESTER

her hands clasped about her knees, was listening intently.

"It was eight years ago that the betrothal took place, if you will remember," began the friar in the satisfied tone of one who feels that what he is about to tell will be vastly interesting to his audience. "I was riding my mule to the city of Amboise on business for my order.

"At Herdin, which is near that city, I saw a great concourse of people, and being under a vow of silence for that day, I could ask no questions, but drew up with the crowd to see what was going on. The air was wild with the acclamations of the people, and *gens d'armes* were stalking about to make the crowd stand back so that the road might be left unobstructed.

"Then from the city came a glittering procession of ladies and gentlemen and archers. At the head of it rode a boy, whom from his dress and the deference paid him, I immediately recognized as the Dauphin of France, so soon to be king. He was about twelve at the time, but he looked younger, being undersized. He wore a robe of crimson satin lined with black velvet, and his black horse was richly caparisoned. Crossing the bridge the boy paused, for, slowly advancing from the opposite direction, was another procession equally imposing, headed by a litter, silk-curtained and surmounted by a crown. And then I knew that I was to witness an event which was to go down in his-

A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

tory, for I knew this was the expected ceremonial of the betrothal of the little Lady Marguerite of Hapsburg, daughter of the Archduke of Austria, to the Dauphin of France.

"The young dauphin saluted the ladies and changed his robe for one of cloth of gold. Then from the litter was lifted a tiny girl between three and four years of age, the little archduchess, whose hair glistened like gold in the sunlight. A tall and elegantly-dressed lady accompanied her to the boy's side, and the prothonotary asked in a loud voice if Charles of France would take Marguerite of Austria for his bride. The boy answered 'Yes' in a loud, clear voice, and a similar question was put to the little archduchess, who, after a whispered word from the lady at her side, uttered a faint 'Yes.'

"And when I rode on to Amboise I found the city gay with festoons of brilliantly-colored cloth, and in the market place there was a fountain which gave forth both white and red wine."

"The dear little princess!" said the innkeeper's wife. "Though she is to be Queen of France, I pity her, thus to be betrothed without a word of choice in the matter."

"The good God has not divided happiness so unevenly as some might suppose," observed the friar, "for in some things the peasant woman enjoys more liberty than the queen."

"The dear little Lady Marguerite was taken

THE COURT JESTER

from her own country and all her kin that she might grow up in a foreign court and be a true French woman," said one of the women. "And she was beautiful, did you say, Brother Sebastain?"

"I did not have a good view of her face, but I should say that she was very fair to look upon," he replied.

"Pretty she had a right to be," said Le Glorieux. "Her mother was as beautiful as the morning, and her father, when I saw him, looked like a glorious knight descended from the clouds. He was mounted on a chestnut horse; he was clad in silver armor and his head was bound by a circlet of precious stones. His smile was so kind and his face so handsome that he won all hearts."

"Look! That child is about to fall out of the window!" cried the friar, for the little one was gazing at the speaker with her soul in her eyes, and the better to see him, was sitting on the very edge of the window-sill in a way that indeed suggested a possible fall. Seeing all eyes turned upon her she drew herself back and clasped her hands about her knees as before.

"And now," said the innkeeper, "I notice that a young gentleman of the company has a lute, and I am sure we should all enjoy a song." He looked at Antoine, who, though silent, had been very much engaged with the good things set before him.

"You are right, mine host," said Le Glorieux. "My comrade sings in such a way that I am sure

'A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

the nightingales outside will cease to trill from pure envy."

Musicians, and indeed all people who are capable of entertaining others, have fits of diffidence at the most unexpected moments, and although he was in the habit of singing for the ladies of the Burgundian court, who knew far more about music than these people could possibly understand, it seemed to Antoine that if he could unseen escape by the door, and run away into the woods, or sink through the floor, it would be the greatest boon that could happen to him. Not being able to efface himself in any way, he resorted to a fib, and said that he would be most happy to oblige them, but that a string of his lute was broken, and that he had no other with which to replace it.

Le Glorieux strode to the corner of the room and took up the lute where the boy had placed it before supper. It was an instrument resembling a modern mandolin with a crooked neck, as if it had once been strangled, and becoming convulsed in the effort to breathe, had remained petrified in that position.

The jester held the instrument out at arm's length, saying, "It is strange, but even a lute can not remain disabled in the neighborhood of the good Saint Roch. Here are all the strings in a perfectly sound condition, and fairly quivering with anxiety to be played on."

A fib, like a murder, will "out" sooner or later,

THE COURT JESTER

and realizing this fact, Antoine said nothing more, but striking a few chords began to sing, though in a quavering voice.

"See here, Antoine," said his friend, stopping him, "I have praised your voice and I am not going to have you sing like a frog that is choking to death in a pond. Open your mouth and let your words out instead of keeping them prisoners behind your teeth."

The boy was very angry at being thus derided, and his voice rang loud and flute-like in an old chanson of Burgundy, to which his audience listened with great pleasure, the innkeeper's wife remarking at its close that it was one she often had sung in her childhood.

"Let him sing some more songs of Burgundy," said the child in the window, speaking for the first time since she had made the remark about the hawk.

Antoine complied, and in the middle of the second song the company was surprised by the entrance of a large woman clad in a loose robe and a nightcap, who, without a word of apology, crossed the room to the window and waving her arms with their wide, flowing sleeves, which in this position gave her the appearance of a large bird that is about to fly, poured out a torrent of words in a strange language, then, swooping upon the little girl, swept her from the window and held her imprisoned in her wing-like arms.



Margaret
Gyweeth.

She laid it on baby Mary's breast

Page 31

A FESTIVAL AT THE INN

The child replied in the same language and in a voice of indignation, but the woman was about to carry her from the room, when the little one struggled to the floor, and taking a piece of money from a small purse at her girdle, she crossed the floor and laid it on baby Mary's breast. Then turning with a brief "Good night" to the others, she followed her grotesque attendant from the room.

"Now I wonder," said Le Glorieux, "if that woman is kidnapping the child?"

"I think not," said the innkeeper. "That was the woman who came with her to the inn, though she did not look like herself in that garb."

"To come before a large company in her night-cap like that was disgraceful," said one of the women.

"She was too agitated to think of her appearance," said the friar. "I think she was very much annoyed at the little one for coming down here alone."

"As if we were ogres to swallow her!" cried the innkeeper's mother indignantly.

"She has given our little one a fine present," said the baby's mother, examining the coin by the rush light. "Husband, it is gold!"

"That child is not an ordinary person; I have said so all along," said the host, with conviction.

Then a lively discussion followed, some of the women, and indeed some of the men also, declar-

THE COURT JESTER

ing that the authorities should be notified and the matter investigated in order to find if the child were being carried off and away from her home in an unlawful manner.

"My friends," said Le Glorieux, "perhaps the advice of a fool is worth nothing, but such as it is you are welcome to it. I always have found that when in doubt as to what course to pursue, you will be convinced that the best plan is to go ahead and attend strictly to your own affairs. That beautiful child knows just why she is here, and it is not against her will, for she had ample time to tell us her troubles and to ask our aid if she cared to do so before that old bird of prey swooped down upon her. So let us go to bed and to sleep, for some of us, at least this boy and myself, must be up bright and early and away before the dew is off the grass."

And so the guests departed to their several homes or to their rooms in the inn, while the host blew out the lights, closed the lattice, and secured the door. And the nightingales sang on undisturbed.

CHAPTER III

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

As the Lady Clotilde and her train were about to ride away the next morning, Le Glorieux said to Antoine, "I think I will go back to the shrine of Saint Roch. You may wait for me. It is only a little way and we can soon overtake the others."

"But why do you wish to visit the shrine?" asked the boy.

"I want to say a little prayer for the gout."

"I never heard you complain of the gout."

"And small wonder, for I have not a sign of it."

"Then why do you want to pray to be cured of a malady which you never had?"

"I am afraid that I may have it," said the fool. "Brittany is a very rich country; the Duchess Anne is the greatest heiress in Christendom, and of course there is to be found at her court everything that the appetite craves, and some day all this may bring on the gout. There is nothing like taking things in time, and it may be a good while before I shall again be so near the good saint."

"Very well," said Antoine, "go, if you like, and I will wait by the roadside for you."

So Le Glorieux rode back to the shrine, which

THE COURT JESTER

was some half a mile out of his way, and remained for a good while, for he remembered a number of other maladies that might attack him in the future, and he thought it was well to be on the safe side by beseeching the saint to keep them all at a respectful distance.

Finishing his orisons at last, he rode forward with as brisk a pace as Pittacus was willing to carry him, but to his surprise and indignation Antoine was not waiting for him, nor was he able to overtake the others. There was nothing to do, therefore, but to ride on alone to the city of Rennes, where the court of Brittany was then staying, and where he hoped to arrive before nightfall.

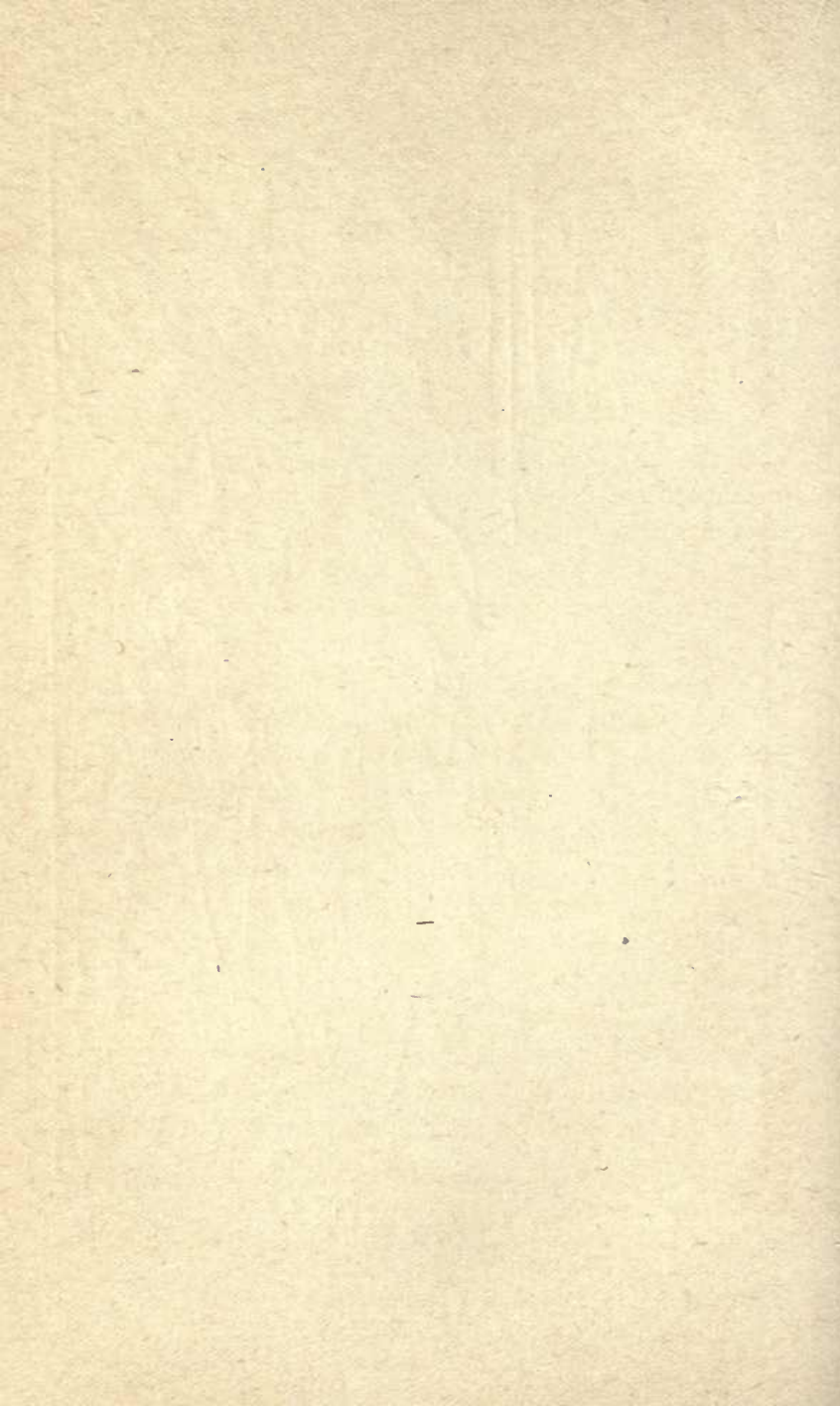
But Le Glorieux missed the company of his comrade, upon whom he resolved to be revenged for thus leaving him in the lurch, and he rode along turning over his wrongs in his mind with a mien far less gay than he was wont to present.

He found as the day began to grow older and the clock of his appetite pointed to the time to refresh himself, that the only meal obtainable was a crust of black bread and a cup of goat's milk procured at a peasant's hut along the way.

"I prayed to be defended from gout," reflected the fool, "but I hope Saint Roch does not intend to keep the disease at bay by allowing me only coarse, plain food. Would it not be a terrible thing if he should put it into the Lady Anne's mind that feeding a jester well spoils his wit?"



Beseeching the saint



AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

As the afternoon was warm, Le Glorieux said, "Pandora, you look sleepy; Pittacus, I am sure that you need a little rest, while I am drowsy. I will just take a small nap under this tree."

So, after securing the donkey to the tree, and allowing Pandora to perch on his saddle, with her cord attached to a ring at the back of it, Le Glorieux stretched himself on the ground, and soon was asleep.

A very sound sleeper, he remained wrapped in the unconsciousness of slumber until the sun was seeking his bed in the west, when he woke suddenly with a start, thinking that Antoine was calling him to get up in the morning. First rubbing his eyes to get the sleep out of them, the jester began to look around for his donkey, for, greatly to his surprise and dismay, Pittacus no longer stood where his master had tied him, both steed and hawk having vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed them up. And still worse was to come, for a silk purse worn at his belt, which contained all of his worldly wealth, had disappeared with his other property.

"Robbed!" groaned Le Glorieux, sinking to the ground and clasping his hands convulsively about his knees. "On a strange soil, afoot, and without a coin to bless myself with. Sometimes I begin to think that I am growing wise, and then it is borne in upon me that I am nothing but a fool after all, for what man in his senses would sleep beside the

THE COURT JESTER

road in broad daylight, with all his possessions unguarded?"

He made up his mind that he had been the victim of a highwayman, which was the natural conclusion at which to arrive, though, strange to say, his sword had not been taken, and his pistol, which he had placed on the ground beside him, was still where he had left it.

"A coward," thought the fool, "to rob a man in his sleep, and not a bray from Pittacus, not a scream from Pandora, to give me warning! How kind I have been to those brutes, and they go with a stranger as cheerfully as if they were not leaving their best friend."

He remained for some time bewailing his ill-luck, and then, reminded by the lateness of the hour that it was necessary to resume his journey, he set out disconsolately on foot.

After walking a short distance Le Glorieux beheld something, the sight of which amazed him quite as much as the discovery of the robbery had done, and made him wonder if he were still dreaming. Secured to a tree and contentedly munching a bunch of thistles which happily were within the range allowed by the length of his halter, was Pittacus! "But Pandora?" cried the jester, for the bird was not tied to the saddle and he feared that she had flown away.

A faint tinkle of bells called his attention to the tree, and there, tied to a limb, was Pandora, who

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

seemed to be guarding her master's purse, which was fastened to a twig beneath her.

Le Glorieux stared with astonishment at finding his belongings in this strange manner. That any one should have taken, and repenting have returned them, he could not believe, and there was but one explanation of the occurrence that seemed at all reasonable.

It was an age in which witches, fairies, and all sorts of supernatural beings were believed to exist, and the fool had no doubt that a witch had played this trick upon him. She would not need a donkey, for everybody knew that when a witch wished to change her usual mode of traveling, she could in the twinkling of an eye turn a bundle of faggots into a horse, which would do very well until she wished to cross water, when it would resume its original form. At any rate, Pittacus was no sort of a mount for a witch, not being sufficiently swift for those lively ladies. A witch could change almost anything into a hawk, so she would not need Pandora, and as to his purse, what use would money be to a creature who could have anything she wanted without the trouble of paying for it? Yes, a witch had done this just from pure mischief and a desire to meddle with something which did not in the least concern her.

Le Glorieux put his purse inside his doublet, determined that the next person who took it from him, whether witch or highwayman, must fight to get

THE COURT JESTER

it. Then taking the bird on his wrist he said, "Pandora, you might, yes, you might have given just one little shriek to let me know what was going on. But why do I reproach you, when no doubt *she* cast a spell over you to keep you from making a sound?"

Then he remembered that with night coming on this was not a safe locality in which to remain, for if witches could cut such capers in broad daylight, what might they not do under cover of darkness, when they are supposed to carry out their choicest and most fantastic schemes? So he hurriedly mounted and sped along the road as rapidly as the donkey could travel.

It was not a pleasant ride through the murky twilight and the gathering gloom of the forest, which he now had entered. The limbs of a dead tree seemed to be long gray arms reaching out to seize him, while to his ears, strained to catch the slightest sound, the crackle of the leaves in the breeze was the smothered laughter of certain ladies supposed to ride on broomsticks, who were amusing themselves at the jester's expense.

It was some time after dark when he saw a number of lights dotting the gloom before him, and he knew that he was approaching Rennes. Greatly cheered by the sight, he put spurs to Pittacus, and in a short time arrived at the gates of the palace and galloped into the courtyard with all the assurance of a guest who is expected.

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

As Le Glorieux dismounted a small figure came running out to meet him. It was Antoine, who exclaimed, "Oh, Le Glorieux, how rejoiced I am that you have arrived in safety!"

"If harm had befallen me I should have borne it alone," returned the jester coldly, "as you did not wait for me as you promised to do."

"I—I—wanted to hurry," stammered the boy.

"Well, you *did* hurry, and you were here long before me, and I hope you are satisfied. Small difference does it make to you that those wretched witches played me such a scurvy trick. They might have turned me into a salamander for all you would have cared."

And without waiting for a reply the jester stalked away.

The various homes of the dukes of Brittany were sumptuous abodes, and Francis the Second, the last of them, was a noble of great wealth who spent his money freely, and was fond of beautifying his surroundings. Le Glorieux walked through spacious apartments that were decorated, gilded, and carved, and hung with richest tapestries, but he trod the polished floors with the air of one who was perfectly at home in a palace, and accustomed to luxurious surroundings. This was indeed the case, as he had gone as a page to the court of Burgundy. He was so happy to be where all was bright and cheerful and to have escaped from the dangers of the forest, that he did not mind the

THE COURT JESTER

severe scathing given him for his tardiness by the Lady Clotilde.

The young Duchess of Brittany was in the long salon surrounded by the ladies and gentlemen of her court. She was one of the most interesting personages of Europe at that time, for, as has already been said, her father's death had left her the richest heiress in Christendom, the owner of a province that France had been trying by hook or by crook to gain possession of for the last five hundred years; a young maiden whose hand had already been sought by the heirs to the crowns of England, France, Austria, and Spain, although she was but fifteen years of age.

The young readers of this story whose parents bear all their burdens for them will find it difficult to understand the position of the little duchess. Her father had idolized her and had stood between her and all care, but at his death, three years before the time when we first meet her, she found herself at the head of a government with many weighty matters awaiting her decision, with a man she detested waiting to marry her, with clever statesmen plotting against her, and great nations threatening war. But now matters had taken a better turn; she had refused to marry the detested man, France had withdrawn its troops from Breton soil, and once more peace smiled upon the land.

The Lady Anne was tall for a girl of her age; she was very fair, and her cheeks glowed with the

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

bloom of health; her nose was straight, and when she smiled her mouth was particularly attractive, the expression of her face being always very pleasing. Her gown of soft dark silken material was more simple than those worn by some of her ladies, and on her brown hair she wore a kind of close cap made entirely of pearls.

"And you are Le Glorieux, sent by our cousin of Burgundy?" she said, after the jester had made his obeisance.

"Yes, Cousin Anne. Her Grace of Burgundy wished to send you something very precious, for she entertains a great amount of respect and love for you. She had a big emerald which Uncle Philip had taken from a Frenchman, who had taken it from a Spaniard, who had taken it from a Moor, which she was going to send you, but she said, 'No, that is not my most precious possession. The jewel of my heart is Le Glorieux, who scintillates day and night; he shall be presented to the most beautiful and the wisest of rulers.'"

The duchess laughed as she said, "Never did I expect to own so large a jewel. Our cousin of Burgundy is most kind."

Passing the Lady Clotilde as he moved behind the chair of the duchess, Le Glorieux whispered to the former, "At least we shall not be bored by reminiscences here, for her Grace is too young to have had any past. Cousin Clotilde, did you ever hear of the princess who kissed the poet?"

THE COURT JESTER

The Lady Clotilde thought jokes a great waste of time, and she rarely saw the point to one when she heard it, but now she actually smiled, an act so unusual with this good lady that the jester afterward declared to Antoine that the muscles of her face creaked, being rusty from disuse.

Time for the rich of the fifteenth century was divided quite differently from what it is to-day. At dawn the watchman blew a horn to announce the approach of day, after which the servants and retainers about the castle began their serious duties, while the heads of the family dressed, said their prayers, and attended mass in their own chapel.

At ten o'clock dinner was ready, and after remaining at table as long as possible, the gentlemen adjourned to the courtyard to play tennis, a game which is hundreds of years old. Supper was at four, after which the lords and ladies of the manor were ready to be amused at whatever form of divertisement that presented itself.

The duchess and her ladies had been playing at cards called "*tarots*," from their checkered backs, a game for which the Lady Anne, at least to-night, did not seem to care, for she threw the cards about carelessly and appeared to be thinking of something else.

She seemed to be relieved and to give a ready assent when a page announced that there were certain performers below who craved the honor of playing before her Grace, the Duchess of Brittany.

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

Theaters as we now have them were then unknown, and strolling players traveled over the country doing their various tricks at inns or in the houses of the rich, where they were paid according to the generosity of the audience. During the day they performed in courtyards, but to-night they appeared in the grand salon, the assembled company moving to one end of it to give greater room.

First came a man with a performing monkey, whose antics excited roars of laughter, followed by a *jongleuse*, or female juggler, who won a great deal of admiration by her dexterity in whirling a little drum about on the very tips of her fingers. Then came a man who could turn a number of somersaults without touching his hands to the floor, which would seem to have been a dangerous feat to attempt, for before each performance he was careful to make the sign of the cross.

This ended the program of the players, and Le Glorieux, who had watched them from his place on the floor, where, sprawling with his elbow resting on a cushion, he was making himself as comfortable as possible, was now anxious to have Antoine appear, for he knew that in his way the boy was far more talented than any who had to-night performed before the court. So, with the permission of the duchess, he went to fetch Antoine.

"Now, my young friend," said he, taking the boy by the ear, "I want you to do us both credit. No choking and squeaking to-night, if you please."

THE COURT JESTER

"You do not know what it is to be seized with a panic," retorted Antoine sulkily. "Very easy it is for you, who have the impudence to flout kings, to talk thus to one who is frightened of strangers."

"Fiel!" exclaimed Le Glorieux. "Do not think of what the people think of you; think of what you think of them, and you will have no trouble," which, although a sentence having a good many "thinks" in it, is not a bad rule to follow when performing in public.

Antoine seemed to heed his friend's advice, for he began a lively air so inspiring that the duchess kept time with her small fingers on the arm of her chair, while Le Glorieux sprang up and danced in a series of glides and whirls, with his fantastic figure reflected in the polished floor.

A good while before the period of which I am telling you there were trouveres and troubadours who used to compose songs while they were singing them. Antoine, being a born musician, often did the same thing when he was in the humor for it, and that too with considerable success.

He now began a weird little accompaniment suggesting the sighing of the wind through the woods, and then followed the woeful tale of witches who stole a knight's purse and horse and hawk, and later transformed the knight himself into a dancing der-vish who kept on whirling and whirling for ever. There was a twinkle of mischief in the boy's eyes as he sang, and although the company thrilled de-

'AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

liciously at the blood-curdling passages, Le Glorieux knew quite well who was meant by the bewitched knight.

When the song was finished the fool stalked forward and picked up the singer by the back of the neck as a mother cat lifts her kittens. "I understand it all now," said he. "Cousin Anne, I thought the witches had played me a trick this afternoon, but it was this little villain, who evidently skulked along behind me, awaiting his opportunity to do me some mischief!"

"I am sure her Grace will not be interested in your private matters," said the Lady Clotilde coldly.

But the duchess was young enough to be interested in nonsense, and she demanded the whole story, Antoine explaining his part of it by saying that he had been waiting all day to be revenged upon his comrade because the latter had insisted upon his singing at the inn on the previous night. "But I did not know, your Highness, that he would sleep so long, else I should not have gone away and left him there. I was very unhappy about him when night came on and he had not yet arrived."

Just as Antoine had finished speaking, a servant came to announce the coming of some of her Grace's soldiers, saying that the captain of her troop desired an audience, which was granted at once.

An officer now entered, a dark-browed man with

THE COURT JESTER

a somewhat forbidding face, who, after bending the knee to the duchess and saluting the company, began his story in the satisfied tone of one who feels that he has been quick to see his duty and has done it rather better than most people would have managed it in his place.

He said that he had stopped that morning at an inn for some refreshments, and that the innkeeper had shown him a gold piece given his child the night before by a little girl whose costume did not warrant the gift, and that the latter had seemed so much superior in station to the woman with whom she was traveling that he could not help fearing that the child was being unlawfully conveyed away.

Later the officer and his men had overtaken the mysterious couple, and after putting some questions the officer was convinced that the woman had been sent to Brittany by the French, for she had become very much confused when he questioned her, and implored him to allow her to go on her way unmolested. Her words and manner excited his suspicions still further, and without more ado he had taken them both prisoners, and had brought them to the palace with him. The woman was a foreigner, she said, but she acknowledged that she had lived for years in France, and he did not hesitate to say that he believed her to be a spy.

The Lady Anne, so far from being gratified by this intelligence, looked very much annoyed. "We

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

are no longer at war with France," she said coldly. "It would have been better to have believed the woman's account of herself and let the two go on their way."

Considerably dismayed at thus being reproved where he had expected to be commended, the officer could not forbear to reply that France had broken her word with Brittany in the past, and who could tell but that she might be planning some new piece of treachery?

"Let the prisoners appear before me," said the duchess, and after some little delay the prisoners were brought in, and Le Glorieux and Antoine beheld—as the former, at least, had suspected—the same woman and child who had stopped at the inn on the previous night.

The woman was pale and frightened, and she sobbed bitterly as she knelt at the feet of her Grace of Brittany. The child too was pale, but she stood silent, with her small hands clasped before her, not offering to kneel, as did her companion.

"Oh, gracious lady, give us permission to go on our way at dawn to-morrow!" implored the woman. "We have been brought out of our way by your soldiers, and if we do not reach home soon I do not know what will happen," and she concluded with another burst of tears.

"You should be German by your accent," said the duchess kindly. "Calm yourself and tell me your name and why you have come to Brittany."

THE COURT JESTER

The woman hesitated, and the child said quietly, "Tell her Grace your name; there is no reason why you should not do so."

"Cunegunda Leutner; I am an Austrian, your Grace," was the reply.

"Then she is a subject of your own, after all, Cousin Anne, since you are to marry the Archduke of Austria, *Poco Danari*," interposed Le Glorieux, who was not afraid to rush in where angels fear to tread.

The little duchess blushed crimson at this speech. Perhaps she was annoyed to hear the name *Poco Danari*, which means poverty-stricken, applied to her lover, and which had been given to Maximilian of Austria because his rich old father was too stingy to allow him necessary funds. Whatever the cause, she seemed about to administer a rebuke to the fool, then controlling herself turned again to the woman.

"And the girl, is she your child?"

"No, your Grace, but I have cared for her from the day she was born."

"What brought you to Brittany?"

"For the reason I told your Grace's soldiers. I visited the shrine of Saint Roch, the blessed saint whose fame for healing all maladies is known far and wide."

"You do not look like an invalid," remarked the duchess, surveying the stout figure and round face of the speaker.

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

"It is the migraine, your Grace, a pain which has troubled me day and night, and which leeches tell me is liable to reach the heart. Oh, dear and gracious lady, I should not care for myself; life is not so precious that I should want to cling to it; it is for this little one that I want to live, and for that reason I have taken this long journey to implore the blessed saint to cure me, that my life may be spared until she no longer needs me."

"Is the child an orphan?"

"Her mother is dead, your Grace. Her mother bade me always to be a friend to her, and I promised."

"Her father is married to a woman who is unkind to her?"

"He—he—is about to be married, your Grace," stammered the woman.

"Cousin Anne," again interrupted the jester, "this woman is telling the truth about the visit to the shrine of Saint Roch. I saw her and the child going there this morning just as I was coming away after a long prayer to be relieved of the gout, which I never have had, but which may overtake me like a thief in the night."

Every one smiled at this remark save the duchess, who again turned to the Austrian. "Why did you bring the child with you upon a journey fraught with discomfort, if not with danger?"

"Because, your Grace, I have sworn never to leave her, and never a night of her life has she slept

THE COURT JESTER

without my first smoothing the coverlid over her little body."

"What is her name? Who is she?"

The Austrian was silent a moment. "If it please your Grace, there are reasons which forbid a reply to that question," she said slowly.

"But I insist upon a reply," said the Duchess Anne, with a touch of that firmness which made her appear older than her years.

The prisoner bent her head still lower as she replied in tones of emotion, "Gracious lady, so well beloved by your subjects, show us a little of that kindness you vouchsafe to others. We ask no favor but to be allowed to depart early to-morrow morning. It is *necessary* for us to go. I know not what will happen if we are longer delayed. Believe me, I am speaking the truth."

"Truly," said the young duchess gently, "we each have a right to the secret of our hearts." After a moment's reflection she said, "You shall go within five days at most, and in a company that will insure your protection. Until your departure you shall be made as comfortable as possible, and you shall not leave my domains empty-handed. This much at least I owe you for the discomfort you have suffered through my overzealous soldiers."

To remain as a guest in this splendid abode, and to receive a sum of money at the end of the visit, to say nothing of a safe conduct home, would not



“I am Marguerite of Hapsburg!”

Page 51

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

by most people be considered a hardship, but the woman looked as if she had received a blow. "Oh, lady," she moaned, "your Grace means to be kind, but let us go to-morrow. Not an hour longer must we wait. Even now our absence may be discovered."

"Discovered?" said the Lady Anne. "Why should a pious journey require so much secrecy? But guard your secret if you like. You shall depart within five days, as I have said; it may be a little earlier; it will not be longer than that time."

"Alas," cried the woman, turning wildly to the child and seeming to forget all caution, "what will *she* say when she finds that we are away? Cold and revengeful as her father, she may send me to my death!"

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked the duchess wonderingly. "Who has the power to punish so severely a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Roch?"

Overcome by her emotion, the woman made no reply, but the child now stepped forward and said in a voice that all might hear, "The Duchess of Brittany has no right to keep me here against my will! I shall depart when I please. My rank is higher than yours. You ask my name? You shall know it, happen what will. I am the granddaughter of an emperor; I am the future Queen of France. *I am Marguerite of Hapsburg!*"

An earthquake shaking the palace from turret to donjon keep would not have caused a greater

THE COURT JESTER

degree of surprise, for there was something in the manner, the tone, and the expression of the child that left no room for doubt. Her exquisitely-poised head was thrown proudly back, and though her full red lips quivered slightly, her eyes were dry and bright.

Strange to say, the fool of the company was the first to gain his self-possession. With a swift, gliding step he advanced toward the little lady, and kneeling he pressed her hand to his lips. "Mary's little child!" he exclaimed with a half sob.

"You said last night that you would give a year of your life to see the daughter of Mary of Burgundy, and now your wish is granted for naught," said Marguerite, smiling.

The Lady Anne now came forward, and clasping the princess in her arms kissed her on both cheeks. "The little lady whom of all others I have most desired to see!" she said. "Happily sheltered in the arms of my own dear father I heard of you, a tiny child away from your parents and in a strange country. And once I sent you a doll. I dare say you have forgotten it," she went on, half laughing. "It was a fashion model that had been sent to my grandmother, who was going to live at the court of France in the time of Charles the Seventh, and it was one of my dearest possessions. It wore a high pointed cap with a long flowing veil, and it had long pointed shoes."

"It must have looked like the old Duchess of

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

Burgundy," remarked Le Glorieux, who was again his old impudent self. "Did it talk of the princess who kissed the poet, Cousin Anne?"

"It was dressed in the mode of the princess who kissed the poet," she returned, laughing. "Do you remember it, Lady Marguerite?"

"Yes, Lady Anne, and I have it still. Since the day you sent it I always have remembered you in my prayers. With it came a little chain set with pearls, but I liked the doll best."

Just here the jester began to laugh immoderately, slapping his knees and stamping at the same time, while every one else smiled in sympathy.

"What do you find so very amusing, Fool?" asked the Lady Anne.

He replied, "Some things that happen in royal families are so very funny that they would make Pandora, my hawk, laugh, though she is such a sulky little brute. Once explained to Pittacus, my donkey, and he would smile until every tooth in his head could be seen. You asked if this child's father was married to a woman who was unkind to her, and her nurse said he was about to be married. And you, Cousin Anne, ha! ha! you are to be the cruel stepmother!"

There was no denying the fact that the Lady Anne was about to be the stepmother of the Lady Marguerite, for Maximilian, who was still young and handsome, was shortly to marry the young Duchess of Brittany.

THE COURT JESTER

But again the duchess seemed to be embarrassed, and she turned her back to Le Glorieux as she said, "My dear Lady Marguerite, I will not keep you here a moment when you must be overcome with fatigue. I will send you to your apartments, where supper shall be served you, and then when you have retired and are resting I will come and talk to you, if I may."

The princess, so far from being conducted to the plain but comfortable quarters which would have been hers had her identity remained a secret, was now shown all the deference accorded a person of rank. Pages, maids, and even ladies of high degree, rushed about to make her comfortable, a delicious supper was served, and she lay down to rest beneath the gold-embroidered canopy of a couch even more sumptuous than her own bed in the palace of Amboise.

Cunegunda, who had been given a room next to that of her young mistress, after smoothing the silken coverlid over her young charge, satisfied that nothing dreadful was going to happen to-night, at least, had retired, and was sleeping the sleep of the fatigued when the Lady Anne entered the apartment of her young guest.

The duchess had changed her gown for a long robe of dark blue silk trimmed in fur, with a little cap of the same, and in this plainer garb she seemed younger and less stately than in the earlier part of the evening.

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

The princess, with her bright hair flowing over the cushions against which she leaned, seemed pathetically young, and it is a singular fact that about these two children revolved the most important events in the history of Europe at that time, events which drove great statesmen to their wits' end, and changed the map of France for all time.

Sitting on the edge of the bed the Lady Anne took the hand Marguerite stretched out to her, and stroking it gently, said simply, "And now tell me all about it. I long to know why France so lightly guards a princess intrusted to her keeping."

"It was as Cunegunda told you," was the reply. "She was suffering and the leeches frightened her. She always has been my nurse. When I was a baby, and, by the desire of our subjects, was sent with my brother to live in Flanders, my beautiful young mother—whom I can not remember—made Cunegunda promise never to leave me, for she knew that my nurse loved me, and love can not be bought. My mother, as you know, was killed when hunting, but Cunegunda never forgot her promise. She came to France with me, and though there are with me Lady Ravenstein and others of my father's court, I feel that none of them is so fond of me as she, for I know that if necessary she would give her life for mine. Anne of Beaujeu, Duchess of Bourbon and sister to the king, is like King Louis, her father, and she would not scruple to take a cruel

THE COURT JESTER

revenge should she feel so inclined. We both dislike her very much, and that is why we are anxious to return before she hears of our absence."

"Did no one know that you had left the palace of Amboise?" asked the duchess.

"Only a few of the servants, who were bribed to keep silence. The Duchess of Bourbon lately has been away, and I have seen but little of her. Some of the other ladies have been ill, and one of them is about to be married. Cunegunda gave it out that I had been attacked by some contagious childish malady, I do not know what, and this kept them away from my apartments, and we stole out early one morning and mounting our mules came away."

"Were you not afraid to go on a journey without any one of authority in your train, and with no one to guard you from highwaymen?"

"Nô, Lady Anne. Cunegunda loves me, you know, and she was better than any one of rank. She made a little stuff gown for me, and she said that traveling alone and unattended we should attract no attention, and could go on our way unmolested.

"I have been quite happy during the trip, for it was all so new and so strange to me, and it was so pleasant not to be surrounded by people who were always watching me. But it was my fault that we excited suspicion. I went down to the inn kitchen to see what the common people do when they are having a festival, and I felt that I must give a gold



Margaret
E. Webb.

“ And now tell me all about it ”

Page 55

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

piece to the baby who had been named Mary in memory of my dear mother. It appears that ordinary people do not give away so much money, and that is what made the company at the inn suspicious."

"And no wonder, you innocent little girl," returned the Lady Anne, smiling. "A person of the station represented by your dress would have given, if anything, just the smallest piece of silver which is fastened to a bit of leather to keep it from being lost."

"I am afraid," went on the princess, "of the consequences of our trip to Cunegunda if our absence should be discovered, and as we have been away longer than we had planned, I fear that even those who were bribed to keep silence will think that something has happened to us, and will feel it their duty to report our absence. Cunegunda is afraid of this, and she is terrified when she thinks of Anne of Beaujeu. But as we shall go to-morrow morning, perhaps we shall be in Amboise before we have been missed."

"Indeed, you are not going to-morrow morning, my dear little sister and cousin," said Anne, using the term employed by royalties when addressing each other.

"Then I am afraid that we shall have a great deal of trouble when we do return," said the princess coldly. "Of course we can not help ourselves; we must remain here if you command it, but I can

THE COURT JESTER

not see how it will benefit you to make us stay against our will. I had hoped that it would be different when you had been told who you were detaining; I am sorry now that I revealed our secret."

She turned her head slightly, and a tear rolled over her temple and dropped into the meshes of her bright hair.

The duchess thrust her arm under the child's head, and clasping her affectionately said, "Do you think, foolish little one, that I am keeping you here for spite? Within a few days you shall set out for Amboise with an escort that even a queen would not disdain."

"It would avail us nothing to return in royal style if we were to be punished sorely at the end of the journey," returned Marguerite dryly.

"You shall not be punished. I already have sent a messenger to the King of France explaining your absence, stating that you are in my keeping, and that you will return in safety."

"The King? Oh, the King would not care. But it is not he who rules France at present; it is his sister, Anne of Beaujeu."

"Let it be Anne of Beaujeu, then," cried the young duchess. "I promise that not one of your golden hairs shall be touched, and that your faithful nurse shall not be harmed in the least."

She rose as she spoke and looked down upon her guest with a proud smile. "France will hardly

AN EXCITING DAY AND EVENING

refuse a request made just now by Anne of Brittany," she said.

"I feel that you will do what you promise, though I do not quite understand," returned Marguerite with a sigh of relief.

For a few moments Anne remained silent, playing with the gilt cords that looped back the curtains of the bed. Then she said, "You evidently do not know that since our recent conflict with France a treaty has been signed whereby I am allowed safe conduct to join the King of the Romans, your father, in Austria. I may sail from St. Malo or go through France, as I choose. I shall take the latter route, and you and your attendant shall go with my suite to the nearest point to Amboise, where you can travel the remainder of the way in safety. Even before I knew your rank I did not like to think of a dainty little creature like you traveling over the country with none to guard you but a woman of the people, and I was going to let you make the journey under my protection. But now you shall ride by my side on the prettiest palfrey in my stables, or in one of my litters if you prefer it." And she gave Marguerite a light kiss on the brow.

"Oh, I am so glad that you are going to marry my father!" cried the princess, with sparkling eyes. "He sent me his portrait by the Austrian ambassador, and he is as beautiful as a knight of the Holy Grail. If I were not the heiress of Burgundy and

THE COURT JESTER

Flanders, but only a little peasant girl, I could live under my father's roof as other children do. But this happiness is not to be granted me, for it is arranged that I am to be Queen of France."

"Those in whose veins courses royal blood may not do as their hearts dictate," said Anne thoughtfully. "But let us talk no more to-night, for it is time for those bright eyes to be closed in sleep."

The two girls embraced affectionately; then the duchess left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

BROKEN PROMISES

After meeting "little Mademoiselle of Austria," as Marguerite was called in the court of Brittany, both Le Glorieux and Antoine felt that they would like to be in her service, and that it was to her, the daughter of their own Mary of Burgundy, to whom they owed their loyalty.

The morning after her arrival the princess sent for Le Glorieux and Antoine to come to her. The Duchess Anne had seen to it that her guest should be clad in a costume befitting her rank, and the coarse gown of the peasant child had been discarded for ever.

Marguerite asked the two comrades a great many questions about the province of Burgundy, and the jester told her many incidents of her mother's girlhood. She listened to Antoine's Burgundian songs with great delight, and she expressed a wish that both jester and musician might accompany her to Amboise, though she said she would not be so selfish as to deprive the Duchess of Brittany of two such merry-makers.

Cunegunda, however, was not happy at the court of Brittany. "I wish that we had been permitted

THE COURT JESTER

to continue our journey as we began it," she said. "I am convinced that it would have been far better for both of us."

"I am not afraid," replied her mistress calmly. "The Lady Anne has promised that we shall return in safety, and she will not break her word." But Cunegunda's round rosy face remained thoughtful and sad.

"Something tells me that things are not right," said she. "I seem to feel it in the air. Everything is going too well for us. Here is your little Highness treated like a very queen with everything done to amuse you, and both of us so comfortable in this beautiful palace that I feel that it is all too good to be true."

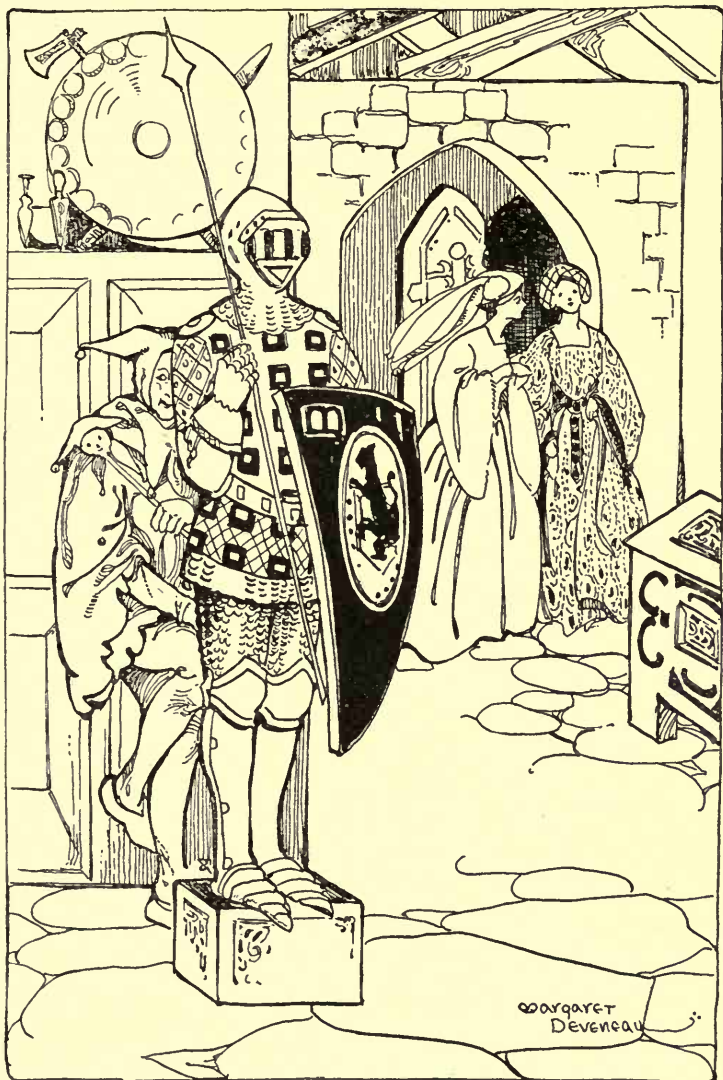
The next afternoon Le Glorieux, who, as has been said, being a jester was privileged to go where he liked, rushed into the apartments of the princess with the remark, "Our Duchess of Brittany soon to be married is listening to a strange man by the oriel window in the grand corridor."

"A jest upon such a subject does not amuse me in the least," replied the Lady Marguerite reprovingly.

"By the mass! nor does it amuse me, for from the few words I caught I am sure it means something quite serious for you, little Cousin."

"Please explain your meaning."

The jester replied, "I was looking at those suits of armor, in the corridor, worn by the ancient



“I slipped behind the armor of a giant duke” Page 63

BROKEN PROMISES

Dukes of Brittany. I was counting the dents made in the helmets and corselets by mace and battle-ax, and wondering if it paid to fight so fiercely, since, after all, the time would come when the bravest would be as dead as anybody else, when I heard the tinkle of ladies' voices, and who should come into the corridor but Cousin Anne and Clotilde.

"I slipped behind the armor of a giant duke and stood waiting to see what was going to happen, for the duchess was as white as Dame Cunegunda's cap and the countenance of Clotilde was screwed into an expression I never had seen it wear in all the years I have reveled in the joy of her acquaintance. They waited for a few moments, then the door at the other end of the corridor was opened and two gentlemen entered."

"And who were they?" asked Cunegunda breathlessly.

"I have not the pleasure of the acquaintance of all the gentlemen of Europe," replied the fool, "and I did not recognize them; but I knew at once that they were Frenchmen. As soon as they had greeted the ladies the taller of the two retired to the other end of the corridor, and Clotilde, as if not to be outdone in politeness, withdrew to the other door; but I remained quietly in my place, for I wanted to hear what was going on. Why is it that people always talk in such low mumbling voices when one is trying to hear what they are

THE COURT JESTER

saying? I have good large ears, and I strained them to their utmost capacity, but I could only catch a word now and then.

"I know that the gentleman was urging Cousin Anne to do something she did not want to do, and that it was a plot against Mademoiselle of Austria, for I heard Anne say, 'Dishonorable both to the King of the Romans and to the Lady Marguerite.' I wanted to hear more, but Clotilde, who I verily believe was created on purpose to make me uncomfortable, seemed to suspect that there was somebody in the place who had not been invited and began to peer about pop-eyed, like a cat in search of a mouse."

"Well, continue!" said Cunegunda impatiently, as the fool paused.

"Let a man reach for his breath, can't you? That was a long sentence. I felt that I was not safe with Clotilde on the hunt for me, so, keeping well in the shadows, I managed to slip to the nearest archway, and I am here with a whole skin, which might not have been the case if Clotilde had spied me out."

"How did the gentleman appear?" asked Cunegunda.

"He appeared to be pretty well, though somewhat anxious," replied the jester.

"She meant to ask you to describe him," said the princess.

"He was not beautiful," was the reply. "I could

BROKEN PROMISES

show you a handsomer man among her Grace's falconers and could pick a better-looking one from a good many other crowds. Put into the suit of armor behind which I stood he would have rattled about like a nut on the inside of a drum. His head was large and his nose, instead of coming straight down, as a sensible nose should do, made a curve over the top. His eyes were big and bright, and Nature, as if to make an apology for giving him such a nose, had stuck a dimple in his chin, which was poor taste on her part, for a dimple looks queer with that kind of a nose. But his manner was so gracious that I fancy one would soon forget his ugliness and think only of the real man shut inside that unprepossessing shell.

"That was a clever sentence, was it not?" asked the fool, stopping suddenly. "I did not know that I could do it. I wish I could always talk like that."

"Did he have a fashion of smoothing his hair from his brow as he talked?" asked the princess.

"Yes, I noticed that. He held his cap in his hand, as a gentleman should. It was black, with a long black plume clasped in place by a great jewel that seemed to wink at me as he talked."

"It was Charles of France!"

"It was the King!" exclaimed Marguerite and her woman in the same breath.

"Because he wore a jewel in his cap?" asked the jester. "Oh, fie! that is a common fashion."

THE COURT JESTER

"You have described the King's face and figure exactly," said Cunegunda.

"Since you mention it, I think it must have been the King," said the fool, "for I now recall the fact that the lady addressed him as 'Monseigneur,' a title not given to common mortals."

"Oh, what is going to happen to us now?" cried Cunegunda, in an agony of distress. "I have known all along that something dreadful was in store for us in this place."

"Then it must be a mournful satisfaction to you to know that you were not mistaken," remarked Le Glorieux.

"Do not stand there making senseless speeches," cried the Austrian woman angrily, "but try to help us out of our troubles. But why do I appeal to you? You do not care for us; you are in the service of our enemies."

The jester instantly became serious. "If danger threatens I will serve but one. I shall know no allegiance but to the princess of my own country, the daughter of my beloved mistress."

Marguerite smiled brightly as she said, "I have no fear that you will not defend me if it should become necessary, Le Glorieux. But I do not think the time has yet come for you to fight for me."

"Your Highness talks like a baby," cried Cunegunda, "and as if you were a person of no consequence! Is it a matter of small moment that the

BROKEN PROMISES

granddaughter of the emperor should be in the clutches of Anne of Brittany, who is plotting against her with the King of France?"

"But why should the King of France plot against me, since I am to be the queen and my provinces will one day belong to him?" replied her little mistress.

"Who can account for the strange schemes of great nations?" asked Cunegunda. "Perhaps your marriage with the King of France is about to be broken off and he and the Duchess of Brittany will hold you as a hostage to extract a large sum from the emperor, your grandfather."

"It would be cruel to demand a large sum from that old and stingy man," remarked Le Glorieux. "The gold of Frederick is as hard to dig out of his coffers as if it were a thousand feet under ground."

"We shall not need his money for that purpose," said the princess. "My dear Duchess of Brittany will never betray me, nor will Charles of France, who is too good and kind to seek to injure me."

"The King is under the influence of his sister, who has no thought but for her own schemes," replied the woman firmly. "We must leave here at once! We can escape to-night unseen and remain in some quiet village until we shall be able to communicate with Austria."

Le Glorieux sat down on the floor and pressed his hands to his head. "This matter is enough to puzzle a wise man, to say nothing of a fool," said

THE COURT JESTER

he dolefully. "Now, let us look at it as it really is and try to straighten it all out." Holding his left hand out in front of him and gesticulating with his right, he went on. "This thumb is Mademoiselle of Austria; this forefinger is the Duchess Anne; the second finger is the King of France, and the third is the King of the Romans. Now, Anne is going to marry the King of the Romans, whose daughter is going to marry the King of France. But what must Anne be at but engaged in a plot against the daughter of the man she is going to marry in order to make things fine and pleasant for her by the time she arrives in Austria. This plot, so far as I can see, is one which the King of France has no reason in this world to have a finger in, but which he takes all the trouble to come in secret to help carry out!"

"Do not sit there tapping first one finger and then the other like a great booby, but help us to get away from here," said Cunegunda angrily. "Here is money to bribe the groom to keep silent. See that our mules are brought out——"

"Stop!" said Marguerite, in a tone of calm authority. "I have told the Duchess of Brittany that I would trust her, and intend to do so. I shall remain here until she goes."

"Remain here with your life in danger?" cried Cunegunda, aghast.

"My life is not in danger. I know not of what she was speaking to the King of France, nor how

BROKEN PROMISES

Le Glorieux may have misunderstood her, but whatever it is, my life is not in peril while I am beneath the roof of Anne of Brittany. Therefore I will not steal away in the night like a criminal. She has said that not one hair of my head shall be touched, and she will not be faithless to her promise. There is nothing for us to do but to keep silent and wait."

"And those two are the hardest things in this world to do," said the fool. "To wait is worse than the toothache, to keep silent is worse than the plague, but put the two together and they are enough to destroy life and reason."

At supper the question of the significance of dreams came up, all discussing it in an animated manner save the Lady Anne, who toyed with her wineglass, often gazing down into it as if trying to read her future in its ruby depths. Le Glorieux sat on a low stool at her side, making a remark when he felt so inclined, and studying her face when he was not talking.

"There are dreams which always come true for *me*," said the Lady Clotilde in the tone of one whose word can not be disputed. "A dream of the dead is one of great importance, as every one knows. When I dream of my father something of moment always happens. He always addresses me as 'My sweet and amiable child.'"

"All kinds of love are blind," remarked the jester. "I had a dream myself last night that is

THE COURT JESTER

of great importance," he went on with his eyes fixed on the Lady Anne's face. "I thought the affairs of Brittany, Austria, and France were a pack of cards, all arranged smoothly, with the proper kings and queens together and the knaves at the bottom of the pack. Then I could see the knaves grow restless and begin to flutter, and lo! the whole pack went spinning in the air, whirling about like dead leaves in the mistral. And when they came together again the wrong kings and queens were mated; for instance, the Queen of Diamonds was paired with the King of Clubs!"

A wave of color swept over the fair face of the duchess, but she said calmly, "It is said that dreams go by contraries, Fool; therefore yours signifies that the kings will find their proper queens."

But the Lady Clotilde, as the jester afterward said, "pinned him with her eye," and later she said in his ear, "I heard a 'fluttering' behind the armor this afternoon that was not cards, for with it was a faint jingle of bells."

"It must have been a dream, Cousin Clotilde," he returned boldly, but he gnashed his teeth as he thought, "Those wretched bells have betrayed me, though I put up my hands and muffled them."

It was late on the following morning when the watchman blew his horn, and when the Lady Marguerite woke it seemed to her that the palace was unusually quiet. She threw her arms over her

BROKEN PROMISES

head and smiled happily as one who has pleasant anticipations, for a new game in the courtyard had been promised and it was of that she had thought upon waking.

The Lady Clotilde entered, followed by a tiring woman. "Her Grace, the Duchess of Brittany, bade me tell your Highness that she was obliged to depart early this morning for reasons which she can not at present explain," said Lady Clotilde. "A proper escort has been provided for you, I shall take charge of you, and in two days we shall start for Amboise."

"The Duchess of Brittany has gone to join my father without a word of farewell to me?" cried the princess, in astonishment. "And she promised so faithfully that I should accompany her as far as possible on her journey!"

"A change of circumstances sometimes necessitates a change of plans, and one is often compelled to break a promise made in good faith. Her Grace bade me assure you upon her honor that no harm shall come to you, and that you shall return to Amboise in safety, and also that neither you nor your nurse shall be reproached for your escapade. And now the mind of your Highness should be at rest. Moreover, she bade me say that since the jester, Le Glorieux, is so devoted to your Highness she has given him to you. And permit me to say upon my own account, that as the singing of the page Antoine la Fitte affords your High-

THE COURT JESTER

ness so much pleasure I shall feel highly honored if you will deign to accept his services and keep him as your own."

"I thank you," replied the princess. "I shall be delighted to have in my service two servitors who amuse me so much, and who will be as faithful to me as I am sure the Burgundians will be. And I feel that I can safely trust in the promise of the Lady Anne."

"I begin to think that my dream about the cards is likely to come true," said Le Glorieux later to the Lady Clotilde.

"And I think that for you a tongue well behind the teeth is the safest attitude to assume in this case," she returned with a frown.

"That is a strange piece of advice to give, Cousin Clotilde," he replied. "Do you usually talk with your tongue in front of your teeth? I never do."

"You know quite well what I mean," snapped the lady.

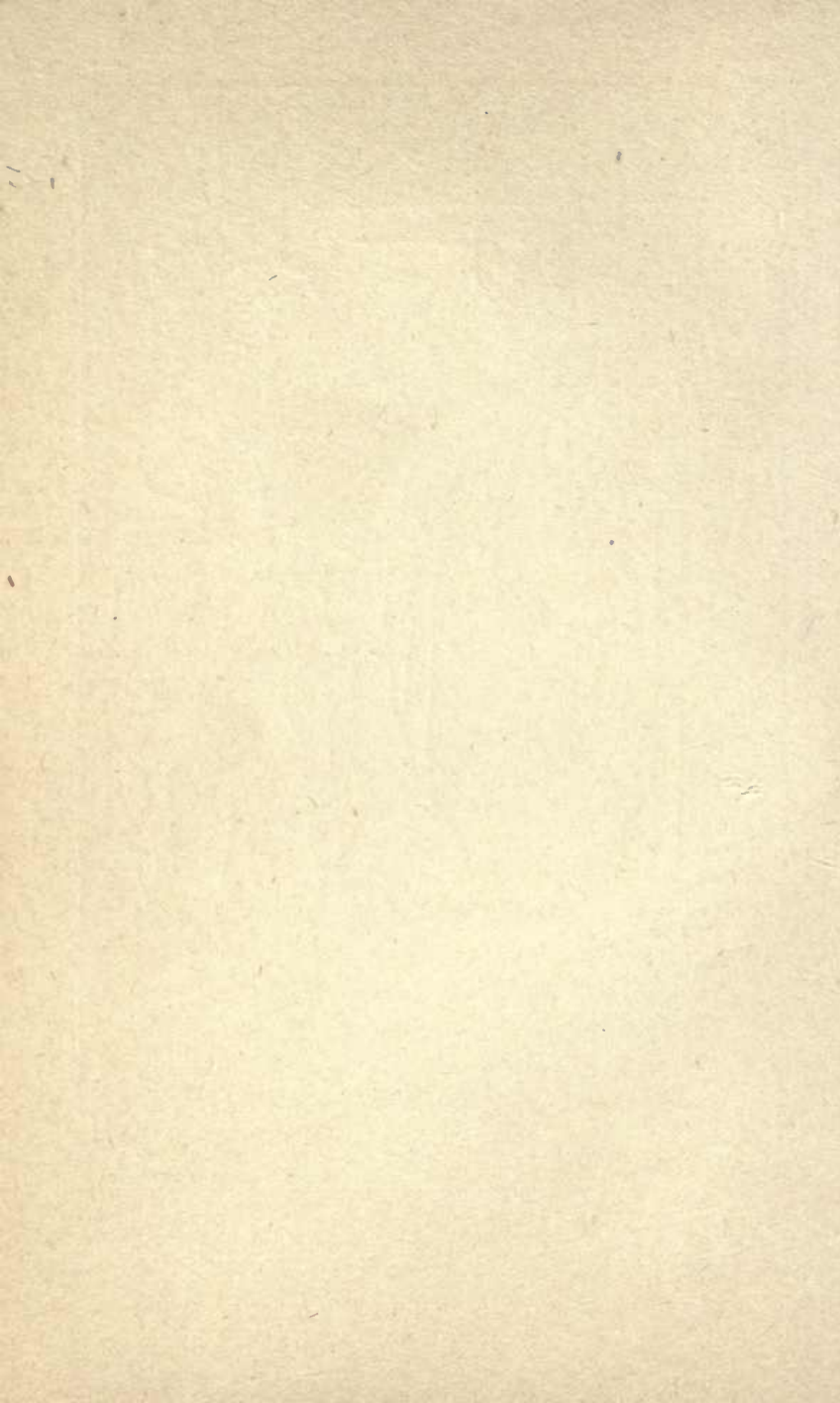
The journey from Rennes to Amboise was not a pleasant one, for the fine weather had been succeeded by chill winds, but the litter of Mademoiselle of Austria was furnished with rich furs to protect her from the cold, and with her train of guards and attendants she traveled in a style befitting a princess.

News traveled very slowly in the fifteenth century, and it was not until they had reached Am-



The little Princess continued to sob

Page 75



BROKEN PROMISES

boise that the mystery which had so puzzled Marguerite and her friends was explained.

The little Lady Marguerite was received in great state at the palace of Amboise by Anne of Beaujeu, Duchess of Bourbon. This princess was a tall, handsome, and resolute woman. Louis the Eleventh said of her when he named her Regent of France, "She is the least foolish of women," for, being crabbed and disagreeable, he thought all women more or less foolish, but that this stately daughter was the most sensible of her sex.

The clandestine journey of the little princess and her woman was not alluded to by the Duchess of Bourbon, and one would have thought that the escapade of a princess disguised as a peasant was an event of common occurrence.

"And now, Madame," said Marguerite, "perhaps you can tell me why the city of Amboise is draped in cloth of gorgeous colors, and why everywhere is the air of a festival which I can not think is caused by my return."

"Madame," replied Anne of Beaujeu in even tones, "a matter has been kept from you for some days, for to me was assigned the duty of acquainting you with a certain piece of news. It has been deemed best that the marriages between the houses of Austria and France and Austria and Brittany should be broken off, although both France and Brittany have appreciated the honor of the alliance. Therefore, a marriage has taken place

THE COURT JESTER

between the King of France and the Duchess of Brittany."

"The King of France and the Duchess of Brittany!" exclaimed Marguerite, with flashing eyes. "The King of France was solemnly betrothed to *me*! Has the treaty of Arras been forgotten? And the King of the Romans, my father, too, has been insulted! Oh, I *hate* France, I hate every inch of it! And the Lady Anne! Why, she told me that she was to marry my father, that she had accepted safe conduct to Austria! And her eyes were so truthful when she said it. Why should she have deceived me when I trusted her, when I—I—loved her so!"

The wound to her heart was greater than that to her pride, and, covering her face with her hands, the little princess wept.

"The Duchess of Brittany expected to be married to Maximilian of Austria when she talked of the matter to you," said Anne of Beaujeu. "It was but a few days before the marriage that she agreed to accept the King of France, an alliance which she was convinced was for the best interests of her people."

"And what is to become of me?" asked Marguerite.

"You shall be sent in the state suited to your rank back to Austria. I beg your Highness to take the matter more philosophically. I greatly deplore the fact that you should have been thus

BROKEN PROMISES

wounded, but in the great affairs of nations personal concerns must take a second place."

The little princess continued to sob, and all withdrew save the jester, who, kneeling at her feet, said gently, "Little Cousin, when the daughter of Austria is ready to wed, the prince of a greater nation than France may be found for her." Then, assuming a lighter tone, he went on, "And a handsomer husband can be easily found than this stunted king. And think of it, little lady, you will shortly see your father!"

"Ah!" cried Marguerite, dashing away her tears and springing to her feet, while a smile dimpled the corners of her mouth, "I had not thought of that! At last I shall see my father! Happy as a peasant child I shall live under his roof! After all, the good God has been gracious to me and has granted my wish."

"And Antoine and I will go with you, leaving the Lady Clotilde carefully behind," cried Le Glorieux. "The Lady Anne has give me to you, and you see I am still, in another way, the Lady Anne's present!"

CHAPTER V

THE WONDERFUL WISDOM OF PITTACUS

To go away at that moment, to leave the hated soil of France forevermore, was now the ardent desire of the little princess, but even royal ladies can not always do as they would like, and she was made to realize that some days must elapse before it would be possible for her to set out for her own country, where her father and her brother would be waiting for her.

The chief delight of the princess at this time was in listening to the songs of Burgundy as sung by the tuneful voice of Antoine. Anne of Beaujeu entered her apartments one morning when the boy was singing his Burgundian chansons. That cold and dignified lady was quite favorably impressed by the singer's talent, and requested him to sing a well-known French song.

"Madame," said the princess, "I shall be pleased to have my page sing for you anything that you may fancy, but you will pardon me if I leave the room while he sings of the glories of France!" And she walked out with her head held high in the air.

Cunegunda was now utterly happy. Her migraine had been cured, thanks to Saint Roch or to

THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

the change of air and scene necessitated by the journey to his shrine, and she was going to return to her beloved country.

"Ah, there is a land governed by a majestic ruler, a man who looks like a sovereign," said she proudly. "But the kings of France, pouf! The old king, who was alive when we came, looked like an old peasant, with his claw-like hands and his awkward legs, and the present one, who in the very bloom of his youth should be ruddy and handsome, has a large head and is undersized and is not at all kingly in appearance."

"But let us think only of the real man shut inside of that unprepossessing shell," said Le Glorieux, adding, "There is that clever sentence again; I was afraid I had forgotten it."

"I do not see anything so very clever about it," retorted Dame Cunegunda; "anybody could have thought it out."

"Anybody might think out things, my good Frau," he replied, "but it is the knowing just when to say them that counts. But I have very bad news for you, and instead of discussing my wonderful gift of always being able to say the right thing at the right time, I really should be bathed in tears."

"Has something dreadful happened to my father? Has news come from Austria?" asked Marguerite, in alarm.

"By no means. Calm yourself, my little princess. The King of the Romans may be at this

THE COURT JESTER

moment climbing the cliffs to surprise the wary chamois, or he may be defying some unlucky knight to mortal combat in the tournament."

"Then it must have been decided that we are to remain in France," cried Cunegunda. "Oh, unlucky was the day that we ever set foot in this unholy land! I might have known that there was no such good luck for me as to leave it!"

"Now you are preparing to cry," said the jester reproachfully, "and if there is anything in this world I dislike to see it is a woman with her face all wrinkled up ready for a boohoo. Your face is round and rosy, and looks well enough when you let it alone, but ever since I have become acquainted with you, you have been ready to weep at a moment's warning; you have shed at least a barrel of tears, and what good has it done you? Learn a lesson of me and smile at things instead of crying about them."

"I never should want to smile had I so wide a mouth as yours," retorted Cunegunda, forgetting in her indignation that she had not yet learned the news that Le Glorieux had come to tell.

"My mouth is the right width for a man of my height," returned he, "and could not be improved upon. But to return to the matter in hand, I will say right here and now that we are going to sail away as soon as the good ships can be made ready for us."

"Then, what is your news? be not so long about

THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

telling it," said Marguerite, knitting her straight brows into a frown.

"It is, alas, alas, that Clotilde is going with us to the domains of your royal grandfather!"

"This is news, indeed. Why must she go?"

"It appears that the new Queen of France, who so cleverly slipped into your place, my little princess, and caught the crown as it was about to settle itself upon your golden head—let me see, where was I?"

"What of the Queen of France?" asked Marguerite.

"Oh, yes; Anne wants a lady of her own kin to accompany you to your native country, to escort you, to watch over you; and Clotilde, you know, is a relative of Anne's, though they are about as much alike as Pandora, my hawk, is like a meek little dove. Nature makes a mistake sometimes and links the wrong people together by the ties of blood; I do not know why, but so it is. I had hoped that the shores of France and the sour face of Clotilde would disappear together from my view, but perfect happiness is possible for no one, and moreover, I never was very lucky."

"If the Lady Clotilde is a relative of the young Queen of France, how does it happen that she has lived so long in Burgundy?" asked Cunegunda.

"My good friend," replied the jester, "you may have forgotten that sometimes even the sourest of women have an opportunity to marry. They man-

THE COURT JESTER

age it, I think, by the aid of witchcraft, and in her youth the sharp black eyes of Clotilde captivated a Burgundian noble who afterward was killed in the wars, and probably was glad of it, considering the life she must have led him."

A number of proverbs have been suggested by the fact that people often appear upon the scene while they are being talked about, and just as he finished his sentence the Lady Clotilde parted the curtains that hung at the doorway. She looked as pleased as her usually stern countenance would permit, and she was accompanied by a boy about fourteen years of age. This boy, afterward Duke of Savoy, and called Philibert the Handsome, was so beautiful that it was a joy to look upon him. The contour of his head, his straight nose, and his well-cut lips were as perfect as if they had been carved from marble by the skillful, loving hand of a sculptor, while his brilliant coloring, his dark and shining eyes, were made still more attractive by the expression of his countenance, which was frank and pleasing. For those days, when men and women vied with each other in the selection of gaudy colors, he was quite plainly clad, wearing a suit of dark velvet with no ornaments whatever.

"I wish to present to your Highness a young relative of mine," announced the Lady Clotilde. "He is Philibert, son of the Count de Bresse of Savoy."

The boy kissed the hand Marguerite extended

THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

to him, and the Lady Clotilde continued, "His father is an ally, as your Highness probably knows, of the King of France."

"To gain my favor it is not necessary to be an ally of France," said Marguerite shortly.

"And you are right, Madame," replied the boy quickly. "Were I in my father's place never again would I draw my sword for France, for nations as well as gentlemen should keep their promises."

This reply pleased the princess so much that her heart was won at once, and she smiled brightly upon the boy as Le Glorieux said, "And now tell me, Cousin Clotilde, how this young gentleman happens to be of your kin. He does not resemble you in the least."

"I am not so sure about that," said the lady. "On the contrary, I think that he looks quite as I did at his age, and even now I can trace a great resemblance between his countenance and my own."

"Your eyes are very sharp, my lady, and you possess the gift of seeing things that are visible to no one else," replied the jester.

"So I have been told," she responded, taking the remark as a compliment. "Philibert's mother was a relative of my own, and this is the first time I have seen the lad, who, young as he is, his father takes with him to the wars."

"I wish," said Marguerite shyly, "that your

THE COURT JESTER

father would ally himself with Austria, since you no longer feel friendly toward France."

Philibert colored with pleasure as he replied, "Indeed, your Highness, I should like it of all things, but my father must do as he thinks best."

"Would you like to go to Austria for a time, Philibert?" asked the Lady Clotilde, who seemed to be in an unusually obliging mood. Then she added, "A visit to a foreign court is of great advantage to a youth of rank, and I will see what I can do to induce your father to allow you to make the journey in my company."

There was no need for the boy to make a reply to this question, his beaming face and sparkling eyes being sufficient to convince any who cared to know that the very thought of such a trip made him happy, and the Lady Clotilde left the room with the words of *Le Glorieux* ringing in her ears, "She will succeed in her attempt, for those who do not obey our Cousin Clotilde from love do so from fear," a doubtful compliment to which she paid no attention. She was quite pleased with the thought of procuring the companionship of this handsome and gracious boy, who, she felt confident, would reflect great credit upon herself.

"Oh, you will be permitted to go with us, I am sure of it!" cried the little princess enthusiastically. "Have you ever sailed in a ship?"

"No, Madame," replied the boy; "I have never been on the sea."

THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

"Nor I, since I can remember it," returned she, "but I long to make a voyage. It must be fine to be so far away from land as to see nothing but the sky and the foam-capped waves, to be on the dark, cold sea and yet be snug and comfortable."

"Once when I was a boy I made a trip on the sea," remarked Le Glorieux, "and I remember that there were times when I was not so snug and comfortable as I could have wished. Believe me, my little princess, you would be much happier traveling on land this time of year than you would be out on the stormy seas. But France will send you home in whatever way it best pleases her, and we shall have but little to say about it."

And it so happened that it was deemed best to send the little princess back to her father by land instead of intrusting her to the sea. This was a disappointment to Marguerite, though she was glad to know that they were to start at once. Already the palace of Amboise was being refitted and refurnished in a style of great magnificence for the new queen, who would not come to occupy it until after her coronation at St. Denis. There was an atmosphere of joy throughout the kingdom in anticipation of the new régime, which was expected to be very different from the terrible days of the previous reign.

Lady Clotilde, who, as the jester had remarked, always managed in some way to get what she wanted, succeeded in persuading the Count de

THE COURT JESTER

Bresse to allow his son to accompany her to Austria, and it was with light hearts that the party set out on the journey, for a trip that has something pleasant at the end of it is always begun joyously, and there is ever a feeling of exhilaration in the thought of seeing a new country. To the little princess her native land would be as an unknown country, for to her it was not even a memory. Not for a moment did she forget her grudge against France. At the first stop they made, when a glass of wine was offered her with an apology for its sourness, she said with a curl of her red lips, "Even the wine is sour in a country that can not keep its promises." And the day they passed through Arras, the town where the treaty was concluded that was to unite her to Charles, and the people ran out with cries of greeting, she turned her head away with a contemptuous reply.

As soon as they crossed the line that divided France from Flanders, Le Glorieux put spurs to his steed and advanced to the side of the litter in which the princess was seated.

"Little Cousin," said he. The curtains were parted and Marguerite's pretty face smiled at him. "You are now in your very own land of Flanders," said he, "the country your mother brought to Austria as her dower."

"And I am glad to be here," replied she. "I could kiss the very soil of the land that is my own!"

The jester now gradually fell behind, and once

THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

more rode at the rear of the procession. "Why do you always ride so far behind?" asked Philibert, checking his own horse to wait for Le Glorieux.

"Do you want me to tell you the real reason?" asked the fool.

"Certainly I do."

"It is because I wish to spare the feelings of Pittacus."

"The legs, rather," laughed the boy.

"I mean exactly what I say—the feelings," persisted the fool. "Do you not think that a donkey can have feelings as well as a person? Of course he can," he went on, answering his own question. "And do you not think that he is greatly humiliated in a company like this?"

"What is there to humiliate him?" asked Antoine, who rode on the other side of the jester.

"Why, look you, many of the other steeds are mounted by the nobility and bear the richest trappings, while poor unfortunate Pittacus has nothing but a common saddle. Do you not suppose that it cuts him to the heart when he notices the contrast? How would either of you feel to mingle with a gay company where jewels flashed and velvets shimmered, while you wore the coarsest fustian?"

"We should not like it, of course," replied Philibert, "but what does a donkey know about such things?"

"If you should ask him about it, you would be very soon convinced of the truth of what I have

THE COURT JESTER

told you, by the reply that he would make," said Le Glorieux.

"Then let us ask him," said Antoine, and immediately raised his voice, saying, "Pittacus, do you mind whether or not you are wearing gay trappings? If you do, just move your right ear." But the donkey refused to make a sign.

"What did I tell you?" asked Antoine mockingly. "He does not know or care what kind of a saddle you have placed on his back."

"He did not hear you," replied the jester.

"I should like to know why he did not hear me; what are such long ears for, if not for use?"

"If you will stop a moment you will see that he will answer me," said Le Glorieux.

"He can not understand conversation when he is walking," said Philibert, laughing.

"Nor well enough to make a reply even when he is standing still," remarked Antoine. "A donkey is nothing but a donkey, and you can make nothing more out of him."

"There are some donkeys, two legged ones, that can not understand things that are told them," retorted the jester, "but if you will stop a moment, you will see that he will answer me. Pittacus is haughty and particular in the choice of his friends, and he will not reply to every jackanapes who asks him a question."

The three stopped and Le Glorieux dismounted, and going close to the donkey's ear, he said, "Pit-

THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

tacus, joy of my heart, it makes you very unhappy to see the other horses dressed so gay while you are wearing your plain old saddle and blanket, I know it does. If I am right, just move your right ear, Pittacus." And Pittacus did move his right ear, and that quite vigorously.

"Now what have you to say?" asked his master triumphantly.

"You touched him with the point of your dagger and that was the cause of it," said Philibert.

"I did nothing of the kind. See, I will ask him the same question again with my hands clasped behind me. If you meant what you said just now, move your right ear again, Pittacus." Again the donkey's long ear moved as before, and, mounting him, the fool said with great satisfaction, "I hope you will believe a thing when you have seen it with your own eyes, and perhaps you will be careful in what you say about him in his presence."

"I do not see that we need to be so very cautious in what we say, since he does not seem to understand what is said to him, even by you, until the question is bawled into his ear," said Philibert.

"He does not take the trouble to answer unless some one he respects talks into his ear; in fact, he hears no questions asked by ordinary people, but he would hear any gossip about himself, for all that," replied Le Glorieux.

Antoine was very much surprised at the superior intelligence of the donkey, but he did not pursue

THE COURT JESTER

the subject further. It was a popular belief at this period that animals actually could talk on Christmas Eve, and if this were true, he did not see any reason why they should not be able to move their ears in reply to a question at any time of the year. But Philibert, although he kept perfectly quiet regarding the matter, suspected the truth, which was that with the word "Pittacus" at the end of the sentence the jester blew into the donkey's ear, which caused the animal to move his generous organ of hearing. He was also convinced that it was not the sensitiveness of the animal to the fine trappings of the other horses that kept him in the rear, but that it was because he was too fat and lazy to keep up a brisk pace.

It was a tiresome journey, though they stopped at the towns, and sometimes were entertained at the mansion of some noble family along the route. Not far from Cologne the princess called to Le Glorieux, who, though there were plenty of attendants to see that she was comfortable, was in the habit of riding forward once in a while to make sure that she needed nothing, "I am told that we are not far from Castle Hohenberg," said she. "Ask two of the gentlemen to ride on and notify them of our coming."

"May I accompany them?" asked the fool.

"Certainly, if you like."

"And I should like to exchange horses with one of the guards."

THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

"Why?"

"Because my donkey, Pittacus, is so sensitive."

"Sensitive?" repeated the princess, looking puzzled.

"Pittacus, little Cousin, is perfectly well aware of the shabbiness of his wardrobe, and to prance into a castle courtyard caparisoned as he is, with two other horses that are well dressed, would be more painful to him than to enter in a crowd where he would not be so likely to be noticed."

"Just as you please," replied the princess, smiling. "One of the guards will exchange steeds with you."

"See the fibs your utter indolence and indifference force me to tell," muttered the fool, as he rode away from the litter. "It is I who am sensitive, and on account of your slowness, but all this does not seem to have the least effect upon you or to make you go a jot faster."

Having exchanged with one of the guards, who did not seem at all anxious to make the trade, Le Glorieux galloped gayly away with the two gentlemen, very glad to be one of the first to arrive at the castle.

Wrapped in his robes of crimson, the sun was sinking behind the forest trees when Le Glorieux and his two companions came in sight of the family seat of the Von Hohenbergs. The building was a grim old structure, turreted and rugged, which had seen two centuries come and go, and seemed

THE COURT JESTER

able to greet many more. Some youths and maidens who had been to the wood to gather fagots were singing and chattering as if the world for them had not a care, though they possessed but the mere necessities of life. The count and countess had not yet returned from the chase, so the strangers were informed by the haughty seneschal, who immediately softened and almost groveled when informed that the Lady Marguerite of Hapsburg was about to honor the castle with her presence, while every being under that roof seemed to be on the alert to put the best foot foremost, in order properly to receive the little princess. Even Le Glorieux was treated with a degree of deference that caused him to throw back his shoulders and strut about with a great deal of pride.

Soon the sound of a hunting horn was heard, and a company of ladies and gentlemen dashed through the gate with hawks on their wrists and followed by hounds. They seemed more quiet and less happy than the fagot-gatherers, Le Glorieux thought, and he wondered if they were really as happy as those young people who were working for their daily bread.

The Count and Countess Von Hohenberg were very pleasant elderly people, with a large family of sons and daughters, and a number of relatives who always lived with them, so their household was a very large one. They were charmed to hear of the unexpected arrival of the princess, who with her



THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

suite soon rode through the gates and received a hearty welcome. A bright fire was snapping in the broad fireplace of the great hall, and did its part in cheering the fatigued and chilled travelers. The guests were conducted to their rooms, which, if they did not contain the luxuries afforded by the sleeping apartments in the mansions of the rich of the present day, were at least comfortable, though the huge beds, with their ghostly hangings, looked as if they might invite the nightmare.

It was a merry company which surrounded the supper table, where Marguerite was, of course, given the seat of honor. Great indignation was expressed at the double insult offered their country by France. "I have heard," said the count, "that Austria has taken up an alliance with England and Spain, so France may learn to fear the house of Hapsburg and its powerful friends."

"And France is no longer governed by the sly and scheming Louis, but by the weakling Charles," said one of the gentlemen.

"I think you are wrong to call Charles a weakling," remarked Le Glorieux, who was sitting on a low stool at the side of his mistress, with his plate in his lap. "Charles has a dimple in his chin, which may mean weakness, but he also has a nose of great size, which may mean anything that is bad for his neighbors."

Just as he finished this speech a mournful shriek was heard outside, which very nearly made the

THE COURT JESTER

fool drop his plate. "What was that horrible noise?" he gasped.

"It was only the wind whistling about the turrets," replied the count, laughing. "The night is growing colder and the wind is rising."

"I thought it was the wail of a witch," said the jester.

"Send for Antoine that he may sing the witch song he gave us one night in Rennes," said the Lady Marguerite. "It is like the howl of the wind."

A servant was sent to fetch the boy, who came with his lute and took a seat by the fire, where he sang the witch song to such words as suited his fancy, for he was not playing a joke upon his friend as when he had sung at the court of Brittany, but was now anxious to please this merry company of ladies and gentlemen. He told how a beauteous maiden with a lovely voice was carried away one dark night by a witch, and changed into a nightingale, where, lingering about her former home, she nightly poured forth the woes of her heart in song. This production received such high praise from the listeners that Antoine blushed very red, and did not know whether to look up the chimney or at the floor, to hide his confusion. Upon learning that he had set his own words to his own music, one of the ladies wanted to know whether the story was true, and if the unhappy maiden really had been thus bewitched. But Antoine was obliged to admit that he had not a personal acquaintance with the

THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

nightingale maiden, intimating that the young woman was merely a creature of his imagination. To-day this would seem a strange question to ask in all seriousness, but, as has already been said, the existence of witches and hobgoblins was taken as a matter of course in those days.

Then they began to talk of the tricks played by witches, and while none of the company could say that he or she ever had actually seen a witch, still almost everybody had a story to tell that had been related by people who had seen those mysterious and treacherous females.

"My mother often talked with witches," said the Lady Clotilde in that decided way of hers which seemed to defy anybody to doubt her word. "And they caused her a great deal of annoyance," she went on. "One day when my mother was fastening a veil to her cap, a witch suddenly appeared and said, 'Oh, what a pretty cap! And that lace is as delicate as frostwork! Let me try it on, do!' And before my mother could say 'yes' or 'no,' the witch had snatched the cap and put it on her head, and with a shrill laugh vanished through the keyhole!"

"How did she get the cap through the keyhole?" asked Le Glorieux.

"That is no more wonderful than getting herself through the keyhole, is it?" asked the lady tartly, annoyed by the query.

"No," returned the fool, "I do not think it is."

THE COURT JESTER

"Then do not interrupt with silly questions," said she.

"I can tell a story of something that happened over a hundred years ago, in this very house, to one of my husband's ancestors," said the countess. Everybody shivered with expectancy, while the wind outside howled louder than ever; Antoine turned his back to the fire so that it would not be convenient for anything to grab him from that direction, while even Philibert, who was two years older, and who sat beside the countess, regretted vaguely that the dagger at his side would be of no avail against witches. For it seemed that if such creatures ever would feel an inclination to meddle with the affairs of mortals, this old castle with its vast rooms and dark corners would be the scene of their liveliest performances.

"As I said," began the countess, "it was a hundred years ago. The Lady Iolantha, whose father and brothers had all been killed in the wars, lived here alone. She was the most beautiful woman of her time, and she was betrothed to her cousin, Count Wolfgang, who had inherited the title without the wealth, for the money all had come from her mother's side of the house, and there was nothing left for the count but the empty castle, which he scorned to take unless the lady should come with it.

"Iolantha, who was willful, detested her cousin, having bestowed her affections upon a wandering

THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

minstrel by the name of Rudolph Eberhard, a handsome youth, and one who sang in a most charming voice. He lingered here day after day, and sang so many songs in praise of her beauty that she determined to marry him, come what would. Wolfgang was not a man to win the heart of a maiden, for, though young, he had a dark, forbidding countenance, and a harsh, discordant voice. Every one feared him, and it was believed by many that he was in league with evil spirits."

"A cheerful kind of an ancestor, that one of yours," remarked Le Glorieux to the count.

"But he lived a hundred years ago; his blood has been filtered away by this time, at least all that was bad in it," said the countess. "The Count Wolfgang knew that his cousin cared nothing for him, still he was determined to hold her to her promise, and he was resolved, by fair means or foul, to get the young minstrel out of the way." The countess now unclasped a girdle that hung loosely about her waist, with long ends coming almost to the floor, and held it up that all might see it. It was made of flexible silver fretwork, and was set with emeralds. "There is a tradition that when this girdle is lost by the Von Hohenbergs their luck will go with it," went on the countess, "so Iolantha cherished it very highly. One night after dancing in the great hall, a dance in which Rudolph was her partner, the girdle suddenly disappeared in a manner that was most unaccountable.

THE COURT JESTER

They searched everywhere, but it could not be found, and one by one the servants were accused, but all to no avail. Then tauntingly Wolfgang demanded that Rudolph be searched. Iolantha indignantly refused to have this done, deeming the very suggestion an insult to the man she loved and respected. But without more ado Wolfgang walked up to the young minstrel, and tearing open his doublet, found the girdle concealed on the inside of it."

"I suspected as much," remarked Le Glorieux, who, like every one else, had been very much interested in the story. "You see," he went on, "the minstrel was dancing with the lady, and it would be easy enough for him to unclasp the girdle and hide it in the folds of his mantle until he had a chance to tuck it away in his doublet."

"But wait," said the countess. "Rudolph was as much surprised as any one else and declared that he did not know how it came there."

"He would naturally make that very remark," observed the fool.

"But Rudolph had not taken the girdle," said the countess triumphantly. "The Count Wolfgang was in league with witches, and it was by their spells that the girdle had come into the minstrel's possession. Servants told the story to their children, and so on down, of how that very night they had heard the witches singing their wild songs, and the old housekeeper saw them dancing in the moon-

THE WISDOM OF PITTACUS

light. She said they were dressed in a gray, misty material like cobwebs."

"Did Iolantha marry the minstrel?" asked the princess.

"No, your Highness. There was nothing to prove that the witches did the trick, and she could not marry a man with so deep a stain upon his good name. So Rudolph marched away to the crusades, and Iolantha married Count Wolfgang."

"And she did a sensible thing," said Le Glorieux decisively. "I have distrusted that minstrel ever since you brought him into the story, which teaches that the man who does a wicked thing is bound to come out at the small end of the horn."

"Thank you, Fool," said the count, laughing. "You have cleared the good name of my ancestor and you are the first one in all these years to say a word in his favor, all preferring to take sides with the handsome minstrel."

CHAPTER VI

LADY CLOTILDE'S MOONSTONE PENDANT

The next morning a royal messenger arrived with a letter for the little princess, and Le Glorieux, who was present when she received it, saw that tears were rolling down her cheeks when she had finished reading it. "What is it, little Cousin?" asked the jester. "Strange that a mere piece of paper should stir you up like this."

"Oh, Le Glorieux," cried Marguerite, "my father does not love me!" And covering her face with her handkerchief, she burst into sobs.

"Well, now that is another strange thing," said he, sitting down at her feet and clasping his hands about his knees, while he surveyed her thoughtfully. "His Royal Highness takes the trouble to send a messenger across the country to tell his little daughter that he does not love her, when it would have been so much easier to let this wonderful piece of news wait until he stood face to face with her."

The princess patted her foot impatiently on the floor while the jester was speaking, then she said, restraining her sobs with an effort, "I have been so impatient to see him that I could scarcely wait for the days to pass, and every morning when I have

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

wakened during our journey I have said to myself, 'One more day is off the list, and I am so many more leagues nearer to him than I was at this time yesterday.' And although the Countess Von Hohenberg is very kind, and has begged me to remain here for a time, still I wanted to go this very day," and again she began to sob.

"Yes," said the jester, "I understand your side of the question, and now I wonder if you won't tell me just what Max writes in his letter, and I will help you to decide just what he means by it."

"He—he—s-s-ays that we are to remain at Castle Hohenberg for three or four days in order that I may recover from the fatigue of the journey. It is c-c-cruel!"

"It certainly is very cruel," replied Le Glorieux. "Odd that there should be such unnatural fathers in the world! A man must have a heart of flint to want his daughter to rest after a long journey."

"I do not at all consider this a subject for jest," said the little lady, surveying the jester indignantly through her tears.

"Looking at the matter broadly, I should say that it was just as much a subject for jesting as for weeping. Will your small Highness tell me what there is in all this to cry about? Do you not know that it is very foolish to cry about little things, and that the tears of even a princess are just as salt as those of anybody else, and if called up in abundance will make her eyes and nose just as red as those of

THE COURT JESTER

a dairy maid who cries over a pail of spilled milk?"

"Le Glorieux," said Marguerite solemnly, "if my father is as anxious to see me as I am to see him, he would write 'Hurry, hurry,' in his letter instead of telling me to wait."

"Would you write 'Hurry, hurry,' to him if he were coming to you on a tiresome trip?"

"Indeed I would! I would say, 'Hurry, and hurry, and hurry again, for I long to embrace you.' Only think, I have lived for eight long years with no one near me but Cunegunda who really loves me, and none of my own blood to touch my brow with a kiss!"

"I do not know," said the fool reflectively, "how I should feel were there none near me to love me save Cunegunda, but I need not worry about that, for Cunegunda, if I read her aright, is not burned up with affection for me; but what you say proves to me that you are not really so fond of your father as he is of you."

"You are dreaming; what do you mean by such words?" asked the princess, wiping her eyes and looking haughtily at the jester. "I adore my father; he is dearer to me than all the crowns of the world."

"It is this way," said Le Glorieux; "as I remark probably once a day more or less, I am nothing but a fool, but nevertheless I say a good many wise things, and I think a good many more. Very often

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

when I remain perfectly quiet my silence counts for a good deal, for I am thinking very hard about something. But as I was going to say, when one has the right kind of affection for another, there is not a grain of selfishness in it. Your father is just as anxious to see you as you are to see him, still at the same time he thinks of your comfort first and of his own wishes next."

"Do you think so, really?" asked Marguerite, smiling, then asked, "But why could he not have come to me himself instead of sending a messenger?"

"Kings and princes can not go about as they please, though they are always supposed to be doing what they like to do," replied Le Glorieux. "A king can not even marry to please himself. He may say, 'I do not want a wife, I prefer to be a bachelor.' The state says, 'Not a bit of it; you must marry.' Then the state picks out a wife for him. If she is pretty and agreeable he is lucky, but if she has a horrible squint and the temper of a tigress and the state says, 'Marry her,' why, marry her he must. Just now your father is probably cooking up a lot of schemes against France for its treatment of you and himself, and he is telling Spain and England how dearly he always loved them, and he is figuring out the lands that France ought to restore to him in return for his great disappointment, so he has no time to rush away to see his little daughter."

THE COURT JESTER

"Oh, Le Glorieux, you have made me so happy!" cried the princess, with shining eyes. "Then you think my father really is very fond of me!"

"I am sure of it, and I am sure that he will be still fonder of you when he sees you, for two reasons: one is that you look a good deal like himself, and the other that you will look at him with the very eyes of your mother."

"The marriage of my father and mother was a happy one, was it not, Le Glorieux?"

"Yes, little Cousin, that was one of the times when duty and inclination went hand in hand. That marriage was the best possible thing for both their countries, and the young couple were in love with each other from the moment when they first stood face to face, your beautiful mother being just a young slip of a girl, and your father but eighteen years of age. He was only twenty-three when she died, and he is still a young man, not so far past the first bloom of his youth."

The princess never tired of talking of her father and of her fair young mother, whose faces were known to her only from their portraits. Her brother, who was two years her senior, she often thought about, but it was her father who possessed the larger share of her affection.

It has been remarked of the Lady Clotilde that she always contrived to stir up some kind of commotion wherever she happened to be, and this jour-

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

ney was no exception to the general rule. The story of the emerald girdle, related by the countess the previous night, reminded the Lady Clotilde that she too owned a jewel which was said to bring good luck to her family, and the loss of which was to be followed by results too fearful to contemplate. It was a large moonstone, set as a pendant and surrounded by rubies. It had been curiously cut by an old Italian lapidary of the previous century, and represented a woman's face, which seemed to change its expression as the colors glimmering in the stone caught the light. This ornament had a great fascination for Le Glorieux. In former days when the Lady Clotilde had wished a special favor from Charles the Bold, she often managed to obtain it through Le Glorieux, who would first make his master laugh, and then while he was in this genial frame of mind the jester would present his petition in the cleverest way it could be framed. And being too penurious to reward her agent with a piece of money, the lady would say, "Le Glorieux, you may clean my jewels, for I know it must be a great pleasure to you to hold them in the sunlight and see them flash," and, while pretending to grant a favor to the jester, managed to gain one for herself.

Of all her trinkets, and she had many and valuable ones, none so charmed the fool as the moonstone pendant. Held in certain lights, the face seemed to dimple and smile upon him; in others, it was the face of a witch, or a gorgon, those

THE COURT JESTER

dreadful beings the very sight of which would turn mortals into stone.

This ornament the Lady Clotilde was resolved to show to the countess, and descant on its history and its great value. With eager hands she unlocked the box of scented wood where the ornament was kept, and lo, the pendant was missing! Could she believe her eyes? In an agony of anxiety she tossed the jewels about, finally emptying the contents of the casket on the bed, where they flashed and glimmered like captive stars sending forth red, blue, and green lights. Frantically she picked them up one by one and shook them, but no moonstone was there!

"It is gone, it is gone!" groaned the Lady Clotilde; then she sank to the floor and began to think of the many terrible things that might be expected to happen to that unlucky member of the family who should allow the stone to go out of his or her possession, the very thought of which made her tremble with terror. Calming herself at last, she reflected that some one must have taken the pendant, since such articles do not rise of their own accord, climb out of their boxes, and go swaggering about the world like a knight in search of adventure. And now the question was, who had taken it? She was sure that none but her own attendants had been near her room, but stay! a maid belonging to the countess had entered the room shortly after their arrival to bring a cup of hot mulled wine



“It is gone, it is gone!” groaned the Lady Clotilde

Page 104

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

which the Lady Clotilde always required, or desired, which amounted to the same thing with her, after a journey in cold weather. She remembered that she had opened the casket and was just about to take out her ruby chain, which she considered a most becoming ornament for her more than generous length of neck, when the maid entered with the wine, and the girl must have slipped the moonstone from the box while the lady was sipping the contents of the cup. She recalled the appearance of the maid, a pale young creature with large startled dark eyes. She no doubt had thought that among so many handsome trinkets the loss of one never would be noticed by this rich and noble lady. The minx would find herself mistaken, however, for the Lady Clotilde was determined to report her loss at once, and to recover her property if it should become necessary to tear the castle down, stone by stone, in order to find it!

As it never had been her custom to delay after making a plan, she immediately stalked down the stone steps leading to the floor below, and entering the salon where the countess and her guests were whiling away the time at cards or with their embroidery, she advanced at once to her hostess. "Madame," said she, "I have lost a jewel. A valuable heirloom which has been in my possession, or rather in that of my family, for a hundred years, has disappeared from my casket."

"I am deeply grieved to hear it, Madame," said

THE COURT JESTER

the countess, rising to her feet, "and I sincerely hope that you will be so fortunate as to find it again."

"I *will* be so fortunate as to find it again—I will, I will in spite of everything," replied the Lady Clotilde excitedly.

"Pray calm yourself, Cousin Clotilde," said Le Glorieux, who was lounging in the window seat. "Try to collect yourself, else I am afraid you will go into a fit. The veins in your forehead are as big as my smallest finger, and you are quite purple in the face."

"Anything that we can do to recover your jewel for you shall be done most gladly, Madame," said the countess. "I will send servants to your apartments to search for it."

"There have been too many of your servants in my apartments already," retorted the other rudely. "I want no searching there; I want the culprit searched and brought to justice as quickly as possible."

"Most assuredly, if we can discover who the culprit is."

"I know who it is," cried the Lady Clotilde. "It is that pale creature who came yesterday afternoon with my mulled wine, a girl with big dark eyes."

"Oh, that was Cimburga; she would not rob you of your gems, Madame. She is an orphan whose parents and grandparents died in our service. She can be thoroughly trusted. Without counting it, I

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

should not be afraid to leave a lapful of gold in her care."

"Your confidence does but little honor to your judgment, Madame," said the injured one, "and what I have lost is of far more consequence than a lapful of gold."

Le Glorieux left his place in the window and came forward, saying, "You seem to be in a terrible state of mind, Cousin Clotilde; I have not seen you in such agitation since the news came to Burgundy of the battle of Nancy. What is the gewgaw which you seem to have valued as life itself?"

"It was the moonstone pendant. You know what it means to me to lose it."

"What, the carved lady who winks her eyes while you look at her?"

The Lady Clotilde nodded.

"This is indeed serious," remarked the jester. "If you but knew, Madame Countess, of the awful things written down to happen to the last possessor of that stone, you would be chilled to the bone. Why, death by slow strangulation would be a pleasure to some of the tortures she will suffer if she does not find it again."

"Some, in fact most, of those old traditions are mere myths," said the countess reassuringly.

"You do not consider them myths when they are connected with your girdle," returned Lady Clotilde tartly.

"At any rate the article must be found if possi-

THE COURT JESTER

ble," said the countess. "Are you very sure, Madame, that you had it when you came here?"

"Of course I am sure that I had it when I came here! Since we left Amboise no one has touched my valuables save myself."

"If you are sure of that, then, no one is to blame for having mislaid it save yourself," said the jester.

"It has not been mislaid; it has been stolen," cried the Lady Clotilde in the highest key of indignation. "I heard that black-eyed girl take it."

"You mean Cimburga?" asked the countess.

"If that is what you call her, yes."

"That girl would not steal," said Le Glorieux. "I watched her this morning while she was feeding the doves. They ate from her hand and perched on her shoulders, and she laughed like a little child. She is as innocent as the doves themselves."

"What do you know about it?" asked the Lady Clotilde. "There is no subject in this world about which you do not give your opinion."

"Why not, since I have plenty of opinions and all are welcome to them?"

"I tell you that black-eyed girl is the one who stole my jewel!"

"Pray calm yourself, my dear lady, and let us get at the bottom of this affair," said the countess soothingly. "You say that you heard Cimburga take the ornament. Was it in the night? If so, you may have been dreaming."

"Suppose it had been in the night, the fact that

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

my pendant is missing would show that I was not dreaming, would it not?" asked the Lady Clotilde with some reason. "But I was not asleep; on the contrary, it was while I was drinking my hot wine with the girl waiting that my valuable disappeared." The idea that Cimburga had robbed her was now so thoroughly fixed in the lady's mind that she was almost ready to assert that she had seen the girl take it from the box. "I had sent my tiring woman to the bedchamber of Lady Ravenstein to borrow a needleful of gold thread, for the trimming of my bodice was slightly frayed and needed mending. During her absence I opened my casket to select the jewels best suited to wear with my change of costume. Just then the girl entered with the wine, which I turned to drink, and I now recall that I heard distinctly a slight click behind me, as the jewels would have rattled if disturbed, and to-day my precious heirloom is missing."

"It was missing then, if somebody took it then," remarked the jester. "But stay, can a thing be missing until somebody misses it? I shall have to think that out carefully some day when I have more time."

"Let us say nothing to Cimburga about it until we have searched," said the countess. She left the room and was absent for some time. When she returned, she said, "I went to the dormitory where all the maids sleep and searched everywhere and all through Cimburga's poor little effects, but no

THE COURT JESTER

jewel of any kind did I find. There was a wooden cross attached to a black ribband which she wears on Sundays and fête days, but that was all in the way of a trinket that could be seen."

"Is it reasonable to suppose that a girl who could slyly filch my property would put it where it could be found?" asked the Lady Clotilde.

"Is there anything unusual in the girl's manner?" asked Lady Ravenstein, one of Marguerite's suite, who had remained perfectly quiet up to this time. "If this be her first offense she may betray herself by an agitated manner."

"She has seemed unhappy to-day," the countess admitted reluctantly. "I stopped her a moment ago in the hall leading to the servants' quarters, and I noticed that there were tears on her cheeks."

"I was sure of it!" cried the Lady Clotilde. "She was crying because she was afraid she would be discovered. I insist that she be brought before us and that she be accused of her crime."

"But let her not be accused harshly," said the little princess, who had been listening intently to all that had been said. "The maid may not be guilty; but if so, and it is her first offense, let us be merciful."

"All I ask is my moonstone pendant, your Highness," said the Lady Clotilde. "And although I think she should be severely punished for taking it from me, still she is not my servant and I have no right to insist upon her chastisement."

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

A page was sent to notify Cimburga that she was wanted, and she came at once, glancing about the room to see what there was for her hands to do, for she supposed that she had been sent for to perform a task.

"Let me question her, Madame," said the Lady Clotilde, and reluctantly the countess consented to oblige her guest, though she felt that she could best have managed the matter herself.

"What have you done with the locket you took from my casket yesterday afternoon?" asked the Lady Clotilde harshly.

The girl, who was pretty, and timid as a fawn of the wildwood, opened wide her eyes, and, gazing at the questioner in surprise, made no reply.

"I say," went on her tormentor in a louder tone, "what did you do with the ornament you took from my box yesterday? You slipped it out, you know, while I was sipping the wine you brought me."

"I, lady? I do not know of what you are speaking," replied Cimburga, in amazement.

"You know perfectly well of what I am speaking. You took it from my casket, I heard you, though you may think I did not, and now where is it?"

"I know nothing of it, Madame."

"Come now, that kind of a reply will not do. You have my moonstone in your possession and you must restore it to me at once."

"Madame, I am telling you the truth; I never

THE COURT JESTER

have taken the smallest thing that did not belong to me, and of that my lady mistress will assure you."

"I can attest the truth of that statement, Cimburga," said her mistress gently, "but if you have been tempted by the sparkle of gems,—and you have a girl's love for things that glitter, even though you are in a lowly walk in life,—if you have taken the lady's ornament, as she seems certain that you have done, restore it to her. And this being your first offense, I promise you that your punishment shall be light."

"But, my mistress, how can I restore what I have not taken?" asked the girl simply.

"Talk about this being her first offense; if so, I am quite sure it will not be her last one, for she is as hardened as one old in crime," said the Lady Clotilde.

Then her mistress said, turning to the girl, "If you are innocent, if your conscience does not trouble you, why were you weeping this morning?"

Cimburga made no reply, but putting her apron to her face, began to sob.

"Come, answer me," said the countess gently.

"My dear and gracious mistress, do not ask me why I was weeping, for I can not tell you," sobbed the girl.

"You might as well tell us," said the Lady Clotilde, "for we are bound to know it sooner or later."

"I will never tell, I will go to my death first," said the girl desperately.

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

"You deserve to go to your death, since you are so stubborn," said the Lady Clotilde vindictively. "But give me back my jewel, and you shall be troubled no more so far as I am concerned."

"I can not give you what I have not got. I call upon all the saints to witness that I know nothing of the object which you have lost."

"She does but blaspheme," said the Lady Clotilde coldly. "Let her be handed over to the law."

The punishment for all kinds of crime was most severe at this time, and it is no wonder that Cimbarga sobbed convulsively as she was taken from the room.

This unfortunate incident cast a gloom over the company. It was easy to see that the countess was unhappy about the accusation that had been made against the young girl who was under her own protection. The Lady Clotilde was sulky and restless, while the others seemed to be puzzled by what had happened. When the gentlemen, who had been hunting, returned to the castle, they were told of the occurrence of the morning, and most of those who gave an opinion were inclined to agree with the owner of the jewel that Cimbarga was guilty, even the count expressing grave doubts as to her innocence. Cimbarga was nothing but a servant, therefore was more than likely to be the thief.

"I wish," said Le Glorieux to Philibert, "that we had left Clotilde in France. I have been ac-

THE COURT JESTER

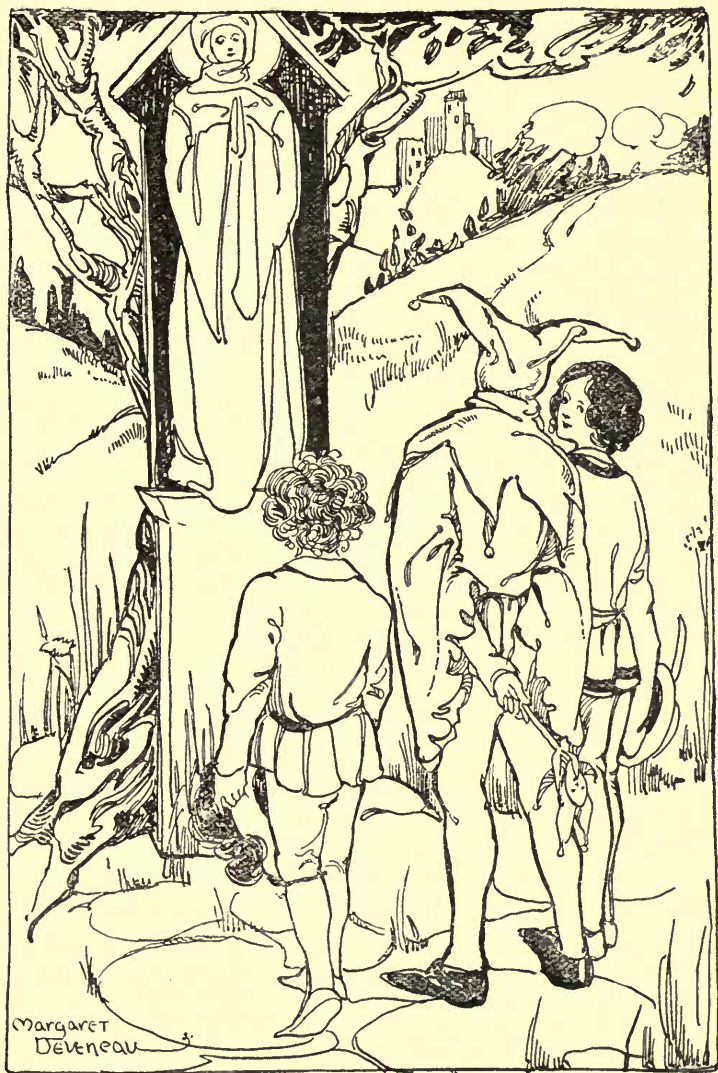
quainted with her for a number of years, and I have never known a time when there was not some kind of agitation on her account. She is always just coming, or just going, or is looking for something that she can not find, or is doing something or other to make everybody around her restless. She is like a whirlwind that picks up leaves and sticks and slams them about. I know that she is your relative, but that is not your fault, my lad, and I respect you none the less for it. We should be judged by our friends and not by our relatives, for we select our own friends. It is a great pity that we are not allowed to select our own relatives too, since we are obliged to see so much of them. I know plenty of people who would have an entire new set of relatives if the thing could be managed."

"Le Glorieux," said Philibert, "I do not believe that the maid stole the moonstone any more than that I took it myself."

"I am not so sure that she is innocent," said Antoine. "Why should she have been weeping at such a rate?"

"Why should anybody weep?" asked Philibert. "For a hundred things. It is no sign because people have been crying that they have also been stealing."

"Let us ask Saint Monica if Cimburga is guilty," suggested the countess the following day. "Our Saint Monica is wonderful," continued she, turning to her guests. "She was placed in her present posi-



They started out to see this wonderful saint *Page 115*

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

tion by one of the Countesses Von Hohenberg, whose prayers for the reformation of an undutiful son were answered, for you know Saint Monica herself knows what it is to weep for a dissipated son, being the mother of the blessed Saint Augustine, who was very wild until miraculously changed to a saint. They say that when persons accused of a crime are made to pass before her their innocence or guilt may be proven at once, for if innocent the saint will make a sign, but if guilty she will remain immovable."

"Has she ever been seen to move when put to the test?" asked the Lady Clotilde.

"Never in our time," said the count, replying to the question. "In my grandfather's time it is said that a youth, accused of stealing a gold image from the chapel, passed before the saint and asked if he was innocent, and she raised her hand and bowed her head. Many others have tried it since, but they were all guilty, for the saint made no sign."

"We will put Cimburga to the test to-night," said the countess. "The moon will be bright by ten o'clock, and at that time we shall not have so many spectators as we should have during the day."

Le Glorieux and the two boys started out to see this wonderful saint. She stood in the forest within a five minutes' walk from the castle, in front of a great oak. She was a painted wooden figure about five feet in height, and she had been scorched

THE COURT JESTER

by the summer sun and pelted by rainstorms until her garments were all a dull gray, her face, partly concealed by her nun's coif, wearing a self-satisfied simper not at all consistent with her garb.

"The good saint is not a tall woman," said Philibert, eying her critically. He walked all around the figure, mounted a stone behind it, and examined it closely. "Some day she will move when they least expect it," he said, "for she is not secure on her pedestal, and a storm will blow her over."

In spite of the fact that a late hour had been set for the visit to the saint, and the matter was supposed to be a secret carefully kept from the servants, when the time came to start a curious crowd gathered and followed the supposed culprit, her master and mistress and their guests, to the statue of Saint Monica.

By Cimburga's side walked a tall young man who was said to be the miller's son, and whose presence beside the accused was viewed with considerable astonishment by those who knew him, for his father was well-to-do, and his station was above that of Cimburga. The face of the girl was radiant with happiness, and those who observed her tranquil countenance wondered why she exhibited so little agitation at a time when she might be supposed to be in a state of despair.

It was a very solemn procession that walked out on that moonlight night. At present there exist

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

comparatively few people who would expect a wooden saint to move, even from a motive so noble as to prove the innocence of an accused person; but, as has already been said, many strange things were believed in the fifteenth century.

Even all whispering ceased as they approached the saint. The princess, warmly wrapped in fur, was riding a little mule, and as Le Glorieux walked beside her she slipped a cold hand into his with a shiver of fear, and all stepped softly over the frosty ground as if fearful of something, they knew not what. The wind swept through the trees, rustling the dry leaves. Was the saint already moving? No, it was only the shadow of a limb, which, stirred by the wind, swayed above her head.

"Hist!" said the castle chaplain, though there was no need to call for silence, as none at that moment felt in the least like talking. Then, in a solemn voice, the priest invoked the saint to deign to decide the fate of the accused maiden then standing before her. Was she innocent of the sin of theft?

He paused, there was a breathless moment of expectancy, then *Saint Monica really did move*. There was no doubt about it. She bowed her head and raised her right hand! All saw her do it, as they would tell their children, and their children's children, for years to come. The priest murmured some words in Latin, then all returned immediately to the castle, for none seemed inclined to remain

THE COURT JESTER

in the neighborhood of the saint who so kindly had set their minds at rest. All gathered in the chapel, where a *Te Deum* was sung, as it had been sung for the first time when the son of Saint Monica was converted.

As soon as the exercises in the chapel were concluded the little princess retired to her own apartments, whispering to *Le Glorieux* as she passed him, "Bring *Cimburga* and the miller's son to me, and let no one else accompany you."

Marveling at this summons, and wondering what the daughter of their future emperor could have to say to them, now that Saint Monica had decided in the girl's favor, settling the question of her innocence, the young couple followed the jester. The Lady *Marguerite* had dismissed even *Cunegunda*, and was all alone when they entered the room. She sat in a large chair, and in a rather unprincess-like fashion, for she had been chilled in the cold chapel, and she had drawn her feet up under the folds of her velvet gown. After the young couple had knelt at her feet, and had saluted her according to the custom of the time, she bade them stand before her, and *Le Glorieux* said with great frankness, "I will leave the room if you say so, little Princess; but to be strictly honest about it, I should like mightily to stay and hear what you have to say to these young folk, and you may be sure that I shall not mention it to a soul."

"It is not a secret," replied the princess; "I was

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

only afraid that they might be embarrassed by an audience."

"They will not be embarrassed by my presence," said he quickly, "for a fool in a room is of no more importance than a cat."

"You make yourself of small account when it is to gain your own ends, but stay, if you like," she returned, laughing.

"And as I do like, I will stay," he returned, sitting down on the floor beside her chair.

The young couple, standing, blushing and abashed before her, gazed with awe at the little maiden, who seemed almost lost in the embrace of the huge chair in which she sat. But when they saw that her eyes were soft and shining, that her lips were curved into a friendly smile, they forgot for the moment that she was of royal blood, and would, doubtless, one day wear the crown of a mighty kingdom. A silver griffin of a scone near by held a light in its claws, which fell full upon Cimburga and the miller's son. The latter was tall and straight, with an honest, noble countenance, and certainly there were many ladies who were not half so pretty as Cimburga. The little princess wondered why these humble people should be so handsome, and concluded that the good God had given them personal comeliness to make up for lack of worldly goods, for certainly the athletic figure of the youth could have been no handsomer clad in velvet and satin than in the plain garments

THE COURT JESTER

he now wore, and the flash of jewels could have made the eyes of Cimburga no brighter than they were at this moment.

"Your name is Cimburga?" said Marguerite, addressing the girl; "that is a Polish name."

"Yes, your Highness, it is the name of my grandmother, who was born in Poland, and who was given the name of the mother of his Imperial Majesty, the grandfather of your gracious Highness."

"That is a mixture of relatives that makes my head ache," observed Le Glorieux.

"Then it may be wise for you to leave the room," replied the princess slyly.

"If I did anything wise I would not be a fool," he returned; "therefore I stay."

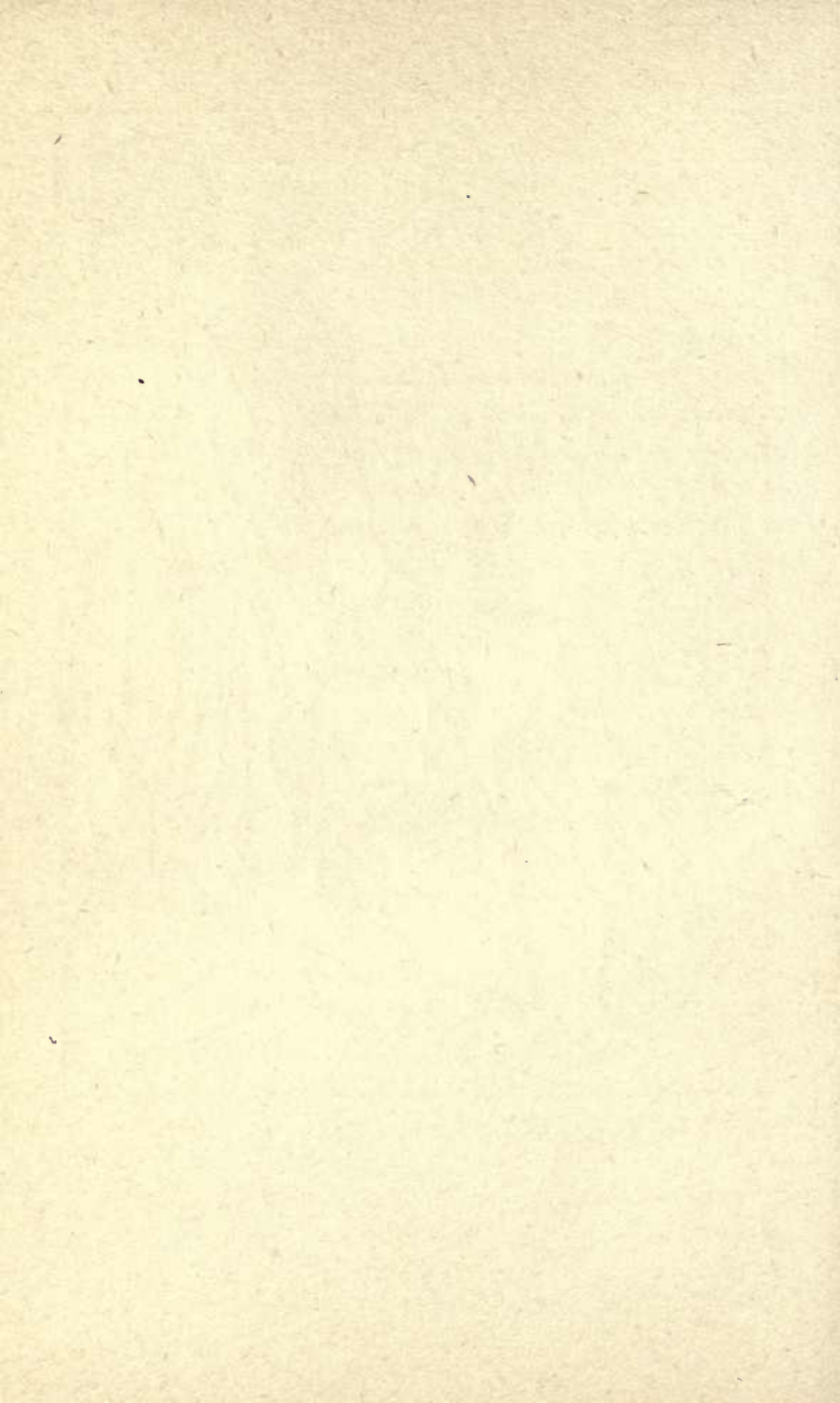
"It is true," said Marguerite, "that my great grandmother was Cimburga of Poland, and it is from her, they say, that the archduke, my father, inherited his great physical strength. And now, Cimburga, I want you to answer my questions and do not be afraid, for no harm shall come to you from anything you may say to me. That you did not commit the crime of which you are accused we all know now, and I felt from the first, but why had you been crying even before you were accused?"

The girl dropped her eyes and a very pretty color dyed her cheeks.

"Your Highness," she faltered, playing restlessly with the cord that laced her bodice, "it was because



“A greater dowry than the weaver’s daughter’s” Page 122



LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

I was afraid that Karl and I could never wed. His father, your Highness, is a miller and a man of means, and he wishes his son to marry the weaver's daughter, who can bring him a dowry, while I have nothing. And I had reason to believe that he was ready to obey his father; but when this great trouble was sent upon me he came to say that he cared only for me, that he believed in my innocence, and that he would stand by my side let happen what would. And after that, your Highness, I was not afraid of anything that might come."

"Karl is a worthy youth," said the princess. "I have heard my good confessor say that there is nothing more beautiful in this world than the love that brings our friends to our side when fortune frowns, and that good friends are the stars that shine all the brighter when night is darkest. But it is not right to disobey one's parents, and you would not wed without your father's consent?"

Karl was about to reply, when Cimburga said quickly, "No, your Highness, but even if his father should never be willing for us to wed, it is a joy to know that he cares for me, and that when all others were against me he still had faith in me."

The little princess now realized that it is sometimes a great pleasure to be a person whose authority can be felt. She at once made up her mind that the mercenary miller should give his consent to the match, and that willingly, even gladly.

THE COURT JESTER

"What is the size of the dowry that this fortunate weaver's daughter will be able to bring to you?" she asked, turning to the young man.

"It is quite a large one, your Highness," he returned, with a sigh, as though he wished from the bottom of his heart that the thrifty weaver had been a gay spendthrift instead of having been a provident money-saver. And he mentioned a sum at which the Lady Marguerite smiled behind her hand, it seemed so small to her.

"Le Glorieux," said she, "go into my bed-chamber and ask one of my women to give you the brass-bound box which will be found in the top of the chest."

The jester skipped gayly away to do her bidding and soon returned with the box clasped affectionately in his arms, and kneeling, he laid it on her lap. She took a purse from the box, and emptying the glittering coins in the chair beside her, she counted the pieces as she restored them one by one to the purse, which she handed to Cimbarga, saying:

"Here is a greater dowry than the weaver's daughter will bring to her husband. I owe you something because one of my own suite has brought you so much trouble. I hope your marriage will be a happy one. Some day I too must marry, and a princess may not make her own choice. Say a prayer for me, Cimbarga, that my betrothal may bring me the happiness that yours has brought to

LADY CLOTILDE'S PENDANT

you. Petition the Holy Virgin for Marguerite of Hapsburg."

"Indeed and indeed I will, your gracious Highness," sobbed Cimburga, as she pressed the hem of Marguerite's robe to her lips. "The sun shall not set on a day of my life in which a prayer has not been said for you."

Le Glorieux rubbed his sleeve across his eyes, saying, "I do not like salt water in any shape. When I sail on it it makes me uncomfortable and ill, and it is equally disagreeable when it tries to drown a man's eyes."

CHAPTER VII

A PLEASANT SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

On his way to bed Le Glorieux remembered that he had not seen Philibert during the whole evening, and passing the boy's room, he pushed open the door and looked in. The apartment was bathed in moonlight; its occupant lay on his couch wrapped in the unconsciousness of slumber. In contrast with the dark stuff of the cushion against which his cheek was pressed, his features were like those of a beautiful Greek god carved in cameo. As his visitor bent over him the boy woke with a start, exclaiming, "Oh, you frightened me, Le Glorieux! With those long points standing out on either side of your head you make a strange figure against the light, and I thought it was the Evil One with his long horns."

"If the Evil One makes a practice of calling upon people who have the cold and unfeeling nature of a carp, you will not escape a visit from him, I can tell you, my young friend," responded Le Glorieux sourly.

"What do you mean?" asked Philibert.

"What do I mean, indeed! Has it escaped your memory that your cousin Clotilde this very morn-

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

ing accused a pretty maid of stealing a moonstone, a winking, blinking face, and which——”

“Of course it has not escaped my memory, and what then?”

“What then indeed! Perhaps that same fine memory of yours will recall the fact that the whole matter was left to Saint Monica to decide?”

“I also remember that fact.”

“And still you were not with us when we visited the good saint. You did not take the trouble to join the spectators.”

“No.”

“When everybody about the place, from my own princess down to the lowest scullion, was anxious to know what the saint would decide, you went to bed and slept through it all like an old man of ninety. I should like very much to know what kind of blood fills the veins of the people of Savoy!”

“Very warm and generous blood, I can assure you, my good fool.”

“Then the supply must have been running very low when you were created, my little gentleman, and it was necessary to weaken it with a good deal of water.”

Philibert, who had risen to a sitting posture, laughed and once more cuddled among his cushions. “Listen,” said he. “The great clock in the tower is clanging the hour of twelve. It is the time when witches come forth and play their tricks. Be careful as you pass along the corridor

THE COURT JESTER

lest one of them should mistake you for her elder brother and snatch at your long horns."

"They will have more business with you than with me, fair youth. Has any one been to tell you what Saint Monica replied? Did you not at least arrange with one of the servants to bring you the news?"

"No."

"And you have not enough interest in the matter even to ask me what was the result!"

"What did the saint do?" asked the boy, clasping his hands under his head and regarding the indignant jester.

"I have as good a mind as I ever had to swallow a bite to eat to let you wait until morning to find out."

"Considering, as you say, that I have no curiosity about the matter, do you think that would greatly disturb me?" asked Philibert. "But come, my good fellow," he added good-naturedly, "do not be angry with me. Perhaps I am overfond of my bed, and this couch is soft with the down of many fowls. Tell me what reply was made by Saint Monica."

"She came to life!" replied Le Glorieux, in a tone of awe, as he recalled the remarkable scene he had witnessed. "It is a great pity that she stood so much in shadow that we could not see her more plainly, but from the moment I beheld her I could see a palpitation as of life beneath her raiment."

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

"Could you see her face distinctly?"

"No, you know it is shaded by her coif. And all say that even before they saw her move they are quite certain that her head was not in quite the same pose as usual, so she must have moved even before we saw her."

"Are you very sure that you saw her move?" asked the boy.

"Am I sure! Am I sure that I am talking to you at this moment? We all saw her move; she bowed her head and raised her hand, and the cause of the girl has been vindicated. She is going to marry the miller's son, and my little princess has just given her gold enough to make a dowry beyond her wildest dreams."

"Did the Lady Marguerite do so?" cried the boy, showing interest and enthusiasm for the first time. "It is like her! She is just and generous, she is an angel."

"No, I could not call her an angel exactly," replied the jester, "for I have seen her eyes flash with anger more than once, though always in a good cause. Our little lady is not without her bit of temper."

"Le Glorieux," asked Philibert earnestly, "have you ever seen an opal?"

"Yes, the old Duchess of Burgundy wore one on her thumb. It is a stone with a red light that rolls about over a green surface."

"Well, it would not be so pretty without the red

THE COURT JESTER

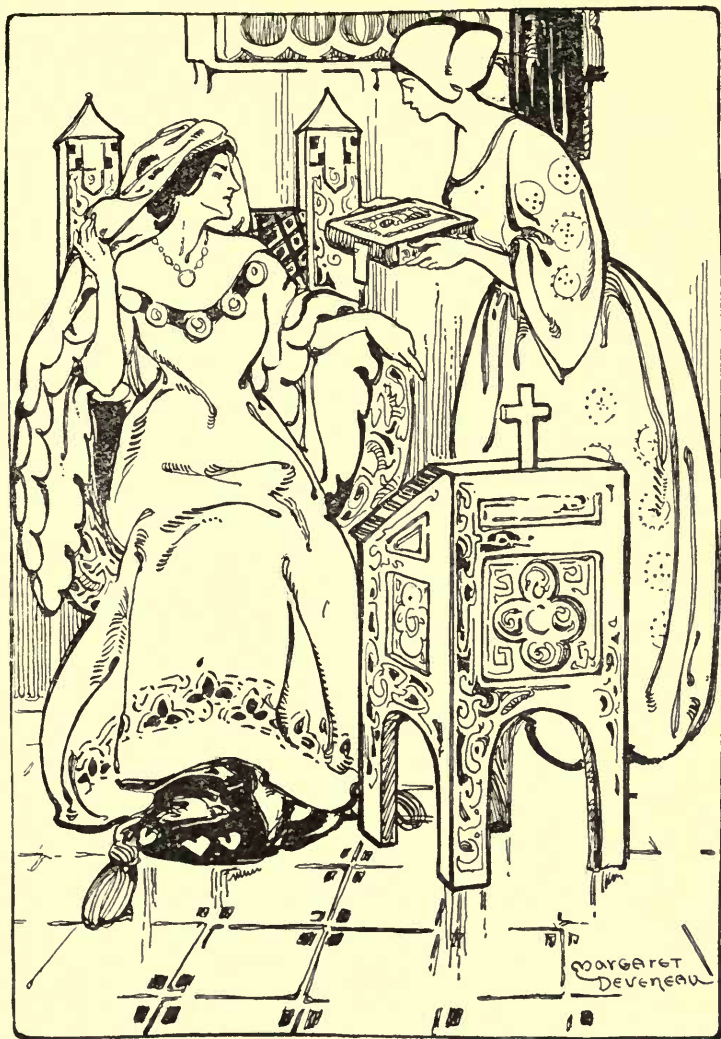
flame, and the princess would not be so perfect without her temper."

"A temper," said the jester, "is a good thing when it is only allowed to come out once in a great while, and that only in a good cause, but as a rule it should be kept under lock and key lest it should work destruction. But I must say good night, else the first streaks of dawn will find me on the outside of my bed, which to a man with my talent for sleeping would be a calamity."

If any one had thought to compare the Lady Clotilde to an opal that night, he would have said that the red flame had absorbed the whole of the stone. She was in a most captious state of mind, boxing the ears of her tiring-woman and scolding everybody within reach. The maid's innocence had been proven, but what good did this do the Lady Clotilde? The pendant was still missing. The whole household was rejoicing, just as if her jewel had been restored at the same time, when its loss was as great a mystery as ever!

"Fetch my book to me," she said when her woman had finished her other duties. "You were about to forget it when you know quite well that I could not sleep a wink without my devotional reading."

The maid placed on a little table beside her mistress a little Florentine lamp of silver that her lady always took with her when traveling. Beside it she placed a book bound in blue silk, with clasps



“I could not sleep a wink without my devotional reading”

Page 128

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

and corners of silver. This volume was a treasure, for on the inside its letters were crimson, outlined with pure gold, and it told of the lives of the saints. But the Lady Clotilde's devotional reading was usually a pretense. It was well to make others believe that she was too pious to sleep until she had refreshed her mind with facts in the life of a saint, but as a rule she went to sleep as soon as her head touched the pillow, and though to-night she was too restless to be overcome by slumber, the handsome book remained tightly clasped, with its gorgeous lettering, done by the patient hand of a monk, still shut from view.

The next day it seemed to Le Glorieux that there was a whistling sound of whispering all over the castle; maids and pages, with their heads close together in the corridors, would fly apart at his approach and assume an air of great unconcern, while a group of ladies in the corners talking all at once, as of something of vital interest, would close their lips tightly when they saw him coming, and one of the gentlemen actually said "Hush!" to the others when Le Glorieux suddenly appeared among them.

"Do you know why everybody is whispering and making themselves look like owls, little Cousin?" he asked the princess.

"They do not whisper when I am present; I know nothing about it," she returned. "I only know that in spite of the good cheer offered by our

THE COURT JESTER

kind host, I am praying that the time may fly on swiftest wings so that I may soon see my father."

"Well, there is either a conspiracy on foot against me or else they are planning a pleasant surprise for me."

"Your imagination is playing you a trick, my good fool. Why should they be planning anything that concerns you?"

Cunegunda entered the room and, like almost every one else Le Glorieux had noticed that day, she wore a beaming smile.

"I have been so accustomed to see you down in the dumps that your present broad grin makes you seem like a stranger to me, Cunegunda," said he. "What is it that you know that makes you look like a beaming saint?"

"What it is that I know, do you ask, Sir Fool? What should I know save that the sky is blue and the air is crisp and clear?"

"The weather is a very good thing to be talked about by boobies who can think of no other subject of conversation," he retorted, "but it has never seemed to me to have a comical side, and there is nothing in it to bring out that broad smile."

"I am not smiling," said she; "my countenance is simply relaxed."

"Then do not relax it any further, or who can tell what the consequences may be?"

Still devoured with curiosity regarding the secret, which he was confident was also being kept

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

from the princess, the fool wandered to the dining-hall, where a lively conversation was going on between the seneschal and the housekeeper. These functionaries were elderly people and both were very fat. They had been serving the count and countess from their youth, and during all those years seemed to have been running a race to see which would grow the stouter. The seneschal considered himself the most important person in the castle; the housekeeper was sure that the family would become extinct should she conclude to leave its service. Probably most of us feel the same about our own surroundings, but the chances are that the world will wag along just the same when we shall have ceased to grace it with our presence.

Having nothing more entertaining on hand at the moment, the jester paused and stood unseen in the shadow of the great chimney to hear what they were saying.

"Oh, me!" said the housekeeper, "I have so much to do with superintending those lazy maids and watching everything that goes on in the kitchen that it is a wonder that I have a bone in my body."

"Nobody knows whether you have a bone; there are no signs of any," replied the seneschal, taking up a silver jug and beginning to polish it with a great show of vigor.

"What are you doing?" asked the housekeeper sharply.

THE COURT JESTER

"I am polishing this jug; did you think I was playing the lute?"

"No doubt you consider that extremely funny," she retorted contemptuously, "but let me tell you that for a man of your age to try to be witty is like the frog trying to sing the notes of the nightingale. Oh, me, I have so much to do that I actually do not know where to begin! I wish that somebody would take as much interest in the management of this place as I do. I do not know what my Lady would do if I should drop out."

"You certainly would be missed," replied the seneschal.

She was greatly surprised at this reply from one who never would admit that she was of any value to her employers. "I am glad that you can see that I should be missed," said she, "and that at last you are coming to your senses."

"It does not require any great amount of wisdom to make such a remark," he returned, surveying the jug with one eye closed, "since it would be very singular if a person of your size would drop out of any place and not be missed."

"There you go again, Mr. Frog! Perhaps the old emperor wants a jester to cheer him up. Do you not think it would be a good plan to apply for the position?"

"I do not know that I should care to do so, but at the same time I think he might do worse than to employ me."

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

"Of all things in this world this is the most wonderful! Is there no limit to your self-satisfaction?"

"If we are not satisfied with ourselves who will be satisfied with us?" he asked. "I am sure that I could make myself fully as useful to his Imperial Majesty as to my present master and mistress."

"And that is not saying a great deal," replied the housekeeper, with a sniff.

"What do you mean? How could the place get on without me? Where is the man in my position who does so much outside of his proper duties? When they are starting to the hunt, who always watches them depart? I do. Who always places the hawk on my lady's wrist? I do. Who else could do it to her satisfaction? No one. I taste everything that comes to the table, for no one else has so delicate a sense of taste or can so quickly detect the absence of the right flavor. And then I keep my eye on all the maids and pages to see that they do not idle away their time."

The housekeeper tossed her head scornfully. "As to placing the hawk on my lady's wrist, I can see no great amount of labor in that. As to 'tasting' the food as you do, which consists of dipping an amount from each dish, seasoning it well and eating it, I am sure there are plenty who would be glad to take your place and consider it no hardship. I notice too that you taste the wine which has been in the cellar for a hundred years, and which our

THE COURT JESTER

master already knows all about. Do you consider that necessary?"

"Did you never hear, my good woman, of a poisonous drug being dropped into a bottle by a scoundrel of a servant?"

"No servant of this house ever has tried to poison his master."

"That is true, but who knows when such a thing might happen? It is always well to be prepared for the worst."

"Since you open the bottles yourself, none else has a chance to put in the poison," she replied, determined to argue the question into shreds.

"Even supposing that no one had an opportunity with the bottles," said the seneschal, "did you never hear of such a thing as chemical action?"

"No, and I want to know nothing of such Satan's work."

"Whether you know it or not, changes take place in liquids sometimes that make them most dangerous, and who can tell what has been going on in a pipe of wine that has had nothing to do for the last century but to get into mischief?"

"It is very thoughtful of you to be so willing to sacrifice yourself," said the housekeeper, with all the sarcasm in her voice that she could manage and be understood at the same time; "but do leave that jug alone! It is my business to see to such things."

"I do not deny that statement, but until I took it up, this jug was as dull as the sun behind a fog."



“Hush ! we were told not even to mention his name”

Page 135

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

Look at it now! A lady could see to rouge her face by it."

"There is no difference in it to what it was before you touched it. But I must go and look after the cook, for the supper to-night must be the triumph of our lives. I hope that we shall not have to wait for our guest, or the dishes may be spoiled."

"He will not mind; he was as gay and easy to please as a burgher when he visited here before," said the seneschal; adding, "I wonder if they have succeeded in keeping the secret from the Lady Marguerite?"

"Oh, yes; all understand that she is not to know."

"I am surprised," said the seneschal, "that a secret so important can be kept by a lot of cackling women."

"Dame Cunegunda says her Highness, the princess, is all impatience to be away," said the housekeeper, who scorned to make any reply to this last taunt. "She will be almost out of her mind with delight when *he* comes."

"Hush! we were told not even to mention his name, for the very walls have ears when a secret is to be kept."

"I am not mentioning any names."

"The friar who stayed the night here," said the seneschal, "told me something about *him*. The friar was at Ulm when he whom we expect was at that city. The cathedral at Ulm has a very tall

THE COURT JESTER

tower, and nearly four hundred steps lead to the top of it. Well, he whom we expect climbed to the top of the tower and stood on one leg on the top of it and turned around! The friar said if any other man had attempted such a feat he surely would have fallen and have been dashed to pieces. But he whom we expect is as brave as a lion, and it was one of his pranks, for he is gay and full of fun."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed the housekeeper, looking up from the silver bowl she was polishing.

"Yes, indeed. And the friar said that while none could be more gracious, none knows better than he how to keep upstarts in their places."

"Than the friar?" asked the housekeeper.

"No, Mrs. Stupid, than he whom we expect. The friar told how an ambassador from the King of Denmark came. The ambassador was very high and mighty. In his opinion no ruler was so good as the King of Denmark, and out of respect to his own ruler the ambassador delivered the message sitting. Then he whom we expect rose to his feet and remained standing during the interview, and the ambassador was obliged to stand also from very shame."

"I am glad that you are forced to acknowledge that something good can come out of my country," said the housekeeper, who was an Austrian, and ended her remarks with a chuckle of delight, for the seneschal was Flemish.

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

"My friends," said Le Glorieux, coming forward and giving the worthy couple a start of surprise as he did so, "as I understand the matter, you are trying to keep a secret."

"Yes, Sir Fool, and we have not revealed it," replied the seneschal proudly, saying, "How long have you been standing there?"

"Ever since you began to polish that jug. You were talking so loud that I did not think you were saying anything that I could not hear as well as not."

"And you heard nothing!" declared the housekeeper triumphantly. "You, sir, were to be kept in the dark, lest in your merry way you should reveal to the princess what she is not to know, and even though you have been standing there all that time, you have heard nothing, for we have mentioned no names."

"I have heard," said the jester, "of a bird found in Africa called the ostrich. This very wise fowl when it wants to conceal itself hides its head in the sand and leaves its big bulky body in plain view. You remind me of this bird. You have mentioned no names, of course, but who is it that the princess most desires to see? Maximilian. Who would be most likely to climb to the top of a tower and turn around on one leg? Maximilian. Who would make an impudent ambassador ashamed of himself? Maximilian."

"Hist, sir! Pray hush," said the housekeeper.

THE COURT JESTER

"That name must not be mentioned, else it will reach the ears of her little Highness, the Lady Marguerite."

"My little princess is in the other wing of the castle, and in order to hear me she would have to have a sense of hearing sharper than any chamois that ever leaped a chasm. And now that you see that I know all about it, suppose you tell me how you know that the archduke, the King of the Romans—in other words, Maximilian—is coming."

"A messenger arrived last night from Ghent to tell us. His Highness does not want the princess to know of his coming; he wishes to see if she will recognize him," said the housekeeper.

"And they wanted this secret kept from me? I do not deny being a fool, for that is how I keep my position at court, but do they think that I am a baby who forgets what it has seen last month? Did I not see Max when he was married, and is it reasonable to suppose that I have entirely forgotten how he looks? They might have known that it would be safer to tell me all about it. If I had seen him coming I might have bawled, 'Little Princess, here comes your father!' and that would have spoiled it all."

"I do not think they remembered that you had already seen him," said the seneschal; "at any rate we were told to keep the secret from you."

"It is a great mistake to try to keep a secret

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

from me," said the fool, "for I always find things out. As well try to keep the presence of the cheese a secret from the mouse, as to try to keep anything from me. And since you have been telling stories about Max, I will tell you one that I heard. One day when he was riding home from the chase, a beggar accosted him. 'Please give me alms, your Highness,' said the beggar, who was one of the whining kind; 'although I am of lowly birth, still we are all brothers and should help each other.' Max handed him a penny, saying, 'Take this, my good man, and if all your brothers give you as much, you will be richer than I.' It may be that Max did not have much money with him at the time; I am sure he did not if it was before his marriage, for nearly all his wealth came from Burgundy and Flanders."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the seneschal, turning to the housekeeper. "Where would your great King of the Romans be without my country? Even a king with no money is of little consequence."

"Pray, pray, good Sir Fool," said the housekeeper, ignoring this remark, "keep the secret from her Highness, and let no one know that you are aware of the coming of the archduke. Our master would be seriously displeased if he knew that we had revealed the fact that the royal visitor is expected."

"Do not be alarmed," replied Le Glorieux; "I shall be as silent as an owl in daytime, for I, too,

THE COURT JESTER

want my little mistress to have the pleasure of a surprise." The end of the sentence was almost drowned by the striking of the clock, and the fool continued, raising his voice, "I do not see why it is, but it seems to me that every time I want to say anything that clock wants to strike at that particular minute!"

"Oh, it is late, it is late," cried the housekeeper, "and we must hurry."

"True," said the seneschal, "let the table be spread at once."

Two boys came in to spread the table, and were soundly cuffed by the seneschal because they put the plates on before the salt, there being a superstition that bad luck was sure to follow unless the salt went on first of all. Some people have an idea that the way to hurry things up is to get into a temper, and this seemed to be the case with both the seneschal and the housekeeper, who bustled about, interrupting each other by the commands they gave the servants, one often countermanding the orders of the other, until their underlings ran hither and thither without knowing what to do. Le Glorieux, who made himself perfectly at home all over the house, followed the pair to the kitchen and seated himself comfortably on the lower step of a winding staircase, which led somewhere to regions above, for the old castle was full of surprises, and one was likely to find door, stairs, and halls where they were to be least expected.

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

All was hurry and wild excitement in the kitchen. At the fireplace, which was large enough to roast an ox, the cook was basting a number of fowls; scullions were chopping spiced dressings, beating eggs, and attending to various features of the coming repast, and everybody seemed to be working in a great haste, for a few sharp words from the housekeeper, seconded by the seneschal, had stirred the whole kitchen into a flurry. "Here, baste these fowls," cried the cook, handing a long-handled spoon to one of the scullions. "Can you not see that I ought to be at work on the pastry? You stand at the other end of the room staring at nothing at all when you know that I must need you here." The cook was quite haughty while administering this reproof, and Le Glorieux remarked:

"Everybody has some one to scold, from the seneschal on down, and I dare say the scullions vent their ill temper on the dogs."

The boy who was beating the eggs stopped to laugh at this remark, for which he received a swift cuff from the housekeeper, who said, "Do you not know that one should never pause for even a moment when beating eggs? You deserve a good drubbing for your heedlessness."

"She beats you and you beat the eggs," remarked Le Glorieux to the boy.

The scullion at the fire began to giggle at this piece of drollery, and tilting his spoon spilled the gravy into the flames, which received it with a

THE COURT JESTER

great deal of sputtering, cracking, and snapping, and an increase of blaze, which threatened to consume all the fowls, and which put the cook into such a rage that he snatched the spoon and hit the boy a crack over the head with it. "Take that for a blundering idiot!" cried he. "From your indifference and carelessness one would think a supper for royal visitors was prepared in this kitchen every day in the week!"

"And it is a good thing that it is not," said the jester, "for in that case I am sure that funerals in this mansion would be frequent. But it is my fault, no doubt. I am making myself too entertaining. I will go now, first saying that if any of you boys should receive a broken skull, I have a box of ointment in my room to which you are quite welcome, and which will cure the wound and cause the hair to grow over it."

So saying he lounged out of the room and to the apartment of his little mistress. Antoine was singing for her a tinkling melody, and the jester began to sway about in time to the music. With mischief in his eyes, Antoine kept singing faster and faster, which caused the jester to whirl about like a top, while the little princess clapped her hands with delight.

"Bravo!" said a voice, when the song was finished, and turning they saw a man's figure standing in the doorway.

"Who are you, sir, that come in unannounced,

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

and what do you wish?" asked the Lady Marguerite, straightening herself up, for she was most dignified at times and would permit no liberties. If his rank might be judged by his costume, this newcomer was taking a great liberty, and the princess continued to gaze at him with a haughty expression of countenance, while he remained smiling, but silent. He was dressed in a simple gray hunting costume, and the hat he held in his hand was adorned, not by a curling plume, but by a feather from the wing of the black eagle.

He was of a fine and graceful figure and a handsome face, and there seemed to be a kind of mist in his eyes as he gazed at the frowning little lady before him, and who said again and more curtly than before:

"Will you be kind enough to tell me what brings you here?"

"I bear a message from the archduke," he replied.

"Oh," cried Marguerite, and forgetting her dignity, she sprang from her chair and advanced toward him. "Give me the letter; where is it? Why do you wait so long?"

"I have no letter; it is a verbal message."

"Then what is it; can you not speak?"

"He bids you be patient for a while and rest."

"Rest! I have rested till I am weary of resting. If that is all you have to tell me, you can return whence you came and ask the archduke, my father,

THE COURT JESTER

if all these years have made him forget that he should love his daughter, and if he believes that she cares not at all for him?"

The little princess did not weep, as she was inclined to do in her disappointment, but her cheeks were flushed and her lips quivered with emotion.

For answer, the stranger strode into the room and, picking up the little maiden bodily in his arms, he kissed her lips, her brow, her hair, and her eyelids a dozen times, for he must have thought, as did Le Glorieux, that her eyes were like those of Mary of Burgundy.

"Oh!" gasped the child, but she did not struggle, for she now realized that this could be no other than her father, the Archduke of Austria.

"I had thought to have kept my identity a secret a little longer, but the glance of those eyes overcame me, quite," murmured Maximilian, while Le Glorieux whispered to Antoine, "Although I am a fool, there are moments and places when and where I feel that my presence is not absolutely necessary, and this is one of them. She will not blame us if we go without her permission, and our room just now is better than our company, so let us go." And unnoticed they slipped away.

Later when the jester saw the archduke he was clothed as became his rank, in velvet trimmed in fur, while gems flashed in the chain about his neck and on his fingers.

"My father," said the princess, who clung to

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

his hand as if she feared he suddenly would vanish from her sight, "this is my jester, Le Glorieux. He once lived at the court of Burgundy. He loved my mother and he loves me; he was given to me by the Lady Anne of Brittany."

"She took your husband and gave you her fool," replied the archduke.

"And who shall say it was not a good exchange?" asked Le Glorieux quickly. "Some of the women who have married into the royal house of France have secured both king and fool in one."

Maximilian laughed. "I see you have a ready wit," said he. "I now remember to have observed you when I stood at the door of the princess' apartments. Did you suspect who I was, Fool?"

"Not at first," was the reply. "Kings may have a divine right, but they have not a divine look when clothed in common wool. You are a handsome figure of a man, but so is many a forester, and even your daughter did not recognize you until you had hugged her like a bear. But now you look very much as you did when I saw you at Ghent."

"You saw me at Ghent?" repeated Maximilian.

"Oh, yes; I can not flatter myself that you saw my fair face, for it was the day you wedded our Duchess of Burgundy; but I remember you for all that, and I have described your appearance on that day a dozen times to my little princess."

Among the company of ladies and gentlemen who surrounded the supper-table none was happier

THE COURT JESTER

than the Lady Clotilde. She wore a costume carefully copied from one she had seen worn by Anne of Beaujeu, and which the tailor who had fashioned it before Lady Clotilde left Amboise would remember to the last day of his life, from the severe tongue lashings he received while he was putting it together. It was of a heavy velvet, bordered to the knees in rich dark fur; about her neck were strings and strings of pearls; a veil of silver tissue bound her brow and hung down her back, while her hair, drawn into a mass on the top of her head, was covered by a sparkling net and spread out on either side like the wings of a butterfly.

"I should think that some of those pearls would get lost in the hollows of Clotilde's neck," muttered Le Glorieux to himself. This reminded him of the moonstone pendant and he wondered for the fiftieth time where it could be. "I have no faith in those curses that were to follow on the loss of the trinket," thought he. "If they had been genuine, something would be happening to her by this time. And she is just as healthy as ever; I watched her at the table, where she ate about four capon wings, to say nothing of a quantity of roast kid and a good many other things. But her luck always has been something wonderful, and a misfortune that would come at full gallop after anybody else would pass Clotilde by and forget all about her."

The subject of piety came up that evening; Maximilian, who was always gay and fond of his



None was happier than Lady Clotilde *Page 146*

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

joke, but nevertheless had great reverence for the pious teaching he had received in his youth, said, "My instructors took pains to impress upon me the fear of God, and they laid great stress upon the commandments to believe in one God, to honor my father and mother, and to do unto others as I would have others do to me."

The Lady Clotilde listened to him as one entranced. Maximilian, who was very good-natured, had made one or two complimentary remarks to her, and she was in high feather in consequence.

"All the world can see how well your Highness lives up to your religious training," said she. "I, too, have had all the great truths so thoroughly impressed upon my mind that I never in any circumstances could forget them. I could no more go to sleep without my devotional reading than I could exist without eating. If your Highness is interested in handsome books, you would admire my *Lives of the Saints*, which I read every night before I close my eyes in slumber. My royal cousin, the Queen of France"—and the Lady Clotilde straightened herself up at the mention of her relationship to so great a personage—"knowing my passion for devotional reading, took from me my old book worn out with constant perusal, and gave me another instead. It was printed by a monk, with his own hands. My royal relative is very fond of such books."

That Queen Anne was fond of such books is

THE COURT JESTER

shown by the beautiful Book of Hours made by her order.

"I, too, am very fond of such books, especially of the kind you mention," said the archduke, "and which I am afraid will go out of existence now that the style of printing with movable letters has come in."

And it may be said in passing that printing had been invented about forty years before by John Gutenberg at Mayence.

"I should very much like to see the volume you mention," went on the archduke.

The Lady Clotilde fluttered with delight at this request, for she was very proud of the volume and would take great pleasure in exhibiting it to the royal guest.

A servant was despatched to her room forthwith, and brought the book, which was handed to the archduke. Maximilian examined the silk of the binding, the chasing of the silver corners, and the clasps, upon which were engraved the arms of Brittany, a country which might at this moment have been his own had not fate played him an ugly trick. Then he unclasped the volume to glance through its pages, and as he did so a bright object slipped from its leaves and fell to the floor. Le Glorieux sprang at once to pick it up, exclaiming as he did so, "Why, Cousin Clotilde, it is your moonstone pendant!"

And then the Lady Clotilde remembered all

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

about it. She had worn the ornament the night before they left Amboise, and as the maid had forgotten to put it with her other jewels, the lady had slipped it into the book, the pendant being flat and the book clasping loosely. She intended to have the case taken from her box where it had been packed ready for the journey, and the jewel put in it as soon as her maid entered the room. And she had forgotten all about the circumstance until this very moment! People who pretend to be what they are not will be discovered sooner or later, and the lady's chagrin was so great that for the moment she was absolutely dumb.

"This is the trinket that caused all that commotion," said the fool. "No wonder Saint Monica helped the girl out of the difficulty."

Of course Maximilian had heard the story of the accusation of Cimburga, and of her miraculous vindication, and he had patted his little daughter's head approvingly when told of the marriage portion she had given the maid. "I am afraid," said he to Philibert, in order to cover the lady's confusion, "that you are not a very attentive squire, else you would have searched for and found the locket, thus saving all the trouble that has followed its disappearance."

"Your Highness, I saw my cousin place it in the book," replied the boy innocently, "but as I supposed she read it every night, I never thought of looking for the jewel in its leaves."

THE COURT JESTER

The way in which events sometimes group themselves is very provoking, not to say maddening. The Lady Clotilde had a fine little story all fixed up in her mind as soon as the first moments of her amazement had passed. She was going to say that the real thief had no doubt repented and had restored her property that very day, knowing that she would find it before she slept. But now Philibert must spoil it all by telling the whole story, for she remembered that she had expatiated to him upon the duty of reading elevating books, had opened this one and held it in her lap, and, seeing the pendant on the table, had censured the carelessness of her woman, and had clasped it in the book, where she said it was safe for the present. She had bragged of her piety to the archduke, and here she was exposed as one who not only had not looked into the volume for more than a fortnight, but who had told a falsehood as well!

"It is truly a curious ornament," remarked the archduke, turning it so that the light played upon the carved face of the moonstone.

"It is an heirloom of my mother's family, your Grace," returned its owner in a constrained, half-hearted way.

"I have been watching for something to happen to you, Cousin Clotilde," said the jester, "and now you will glide along and be as comfortable as the rest of us. After all, it is a good thing that you put the moonstone in a book that you never open, for if

A SURPRISE FOR THE PRINCESS

you had found it right away, you never would have accused Cimburga, and if you had not accused Cimburga, she would never have received the purse of gold for her dower, and then she never would have married Karl, for the prudent miller sooner or later would have persuaded his son to marry the weaver's daughter. So let us be thankful that you are not so pious as you think you are, and that you put the pendant in a book where it would have remained for months, perhaps years, if you had not wanted to show it to Cousin Max."

But the Lady Clotilde derived no comfort from the favor she incidentally had done the maid. It never had entered her head that she owed the girl some reparation for the fright she had caused her, and for the humiliating position in which she had been placed, for the Lady Clotilde did not own the kind of a head that would entertain such an idea.

The beds at the castle were most comfortable, being, as Philibert had said, stuffed with the down of many fowls, and that of the Lady Clotilde was hung with the richest brocade, but as she went to it boiling with rage at Philibert, Le Glorieux, Cimburga, the countess, and everybody in the remotest way connected with the moonstone, it was long before sweet sleep visited her eyelids.

But the little princess closed her eyes with a smile, and soon sank into pleasant dreams; she had seen her father, and he was all that her fancy had painted him: he was affectionate, gay, and hand-

THE COURT JESTER

some. He had spoken during the evening of his combats and she knew that he always had vanquished his opponents. He was a true and brave knight, and happy indeed was she in being the daughter of one so worthy and so favored by fortune.

CHAPTER VIII

A ROYAL ALCHEMIST

The object of her greatest desire, the meeting with her father, having been attained, the princess was in no haste to leave Castle Hohenberg, and as the archduke was glad to rest a while from the cares of state, a number of merry days were spent under its hospitable roof, where everything that could be thought of to add to the enjoyment of the guests was done, with probably a vast increase in the housekeeping accounts, for it is expensive to entertain royal visitors.

In the evening there was dancing in the great hall, and it was led by Maximilian, who chose for his partner the prettiest lady in the room, or the oldest and most ill-favored, for he made himself agreeable to all.

When he spoke of taking his departure one of the ladies declared that she would hide his boots and spurs, which would detain him as long as she should see fit to keep him there, for a prince riding away without those useful articles of wearing apparel would present an odd spectacle. This same trick had been played upon Maximilian in another mansion, and he had good-naturedly yielded to

THE COURT JESTER

the wishes of the mischievous dames and prolonged his stay in consequence. The archduke was friendly to everybody, and on his way to and from the outdoor sports that were arranged for him he chatted affably with any peasant with whom he happened to come in contact, and when we read such things of him we are not surprised that the people adored him.

But, however pleasant it may have been at Castle Hohenberg, there were plenty of other places in Maximilian's wide domain that longed for him or needed him, or both, and ere long the party was ready to continue its journey along the Rhine.

On the morning of their departure Marguerite heard a gay song in the courtyard beneath her window; it was Cimburga, who was going to feed the doves. The birds immediately flew to meet their friend, settling on her shoulders, her head, and the basket in which she had brought their food, the sunlight bringing out the rose tints in the gray of their plumage. The girl scattered the grain with a lavish hand, and then held the end of a crust of bread between her white teeth, turning her face toward her shoulder, upon which two of the most impertinent of the doves had settled, followed by a host of others, who quarreled over the morsel at such a rate that Cimburga, laughing, threw it at them, saying, "Take it, then, greedy ones, since you can not wait."

The Lady Marguerite called to the maid, and



Marguerite heard a gay song in the courtyard *Page 154*

A ROYAL ALCHEMIST

the latter glancing upward beheld a picture which she never forgot as long as she lived, and which always seemed to her like the recollection of a beautiful young saint who had come to life in its niche. In the arched window of the gray old castle stood the little princess, her bright uncovered hair like a halo about her face, which beamed upon the maid with a gracious smile. Marguerite was not an angel, as the jester had well said, but to the girl who now gazed upon her, and who had received so great a boon at her hands, she seemed more than human.

The daughter of the Hapsburgs ignored for the moment the gulf that divided her from this child of the people, just as her father often did in similar circumstances. "Are you happy now, Cimburga?" she asked gently.

"Oh, so happy, your gracious Highness, and all thanks to you!" returned the girl. "The mistress has given me a wedding dress of a beautiful blue, the color that belongs to the Blessed Virgin, and we are to be married next week. And Karl's father has found an inn for him farther south, called The Flying Fawn. And I am to be the landlady of an inn!" She paused and looked very serious for a moment at the thought of her new dignity. Then she broke into a peal of laughter at nothing at all, but just from pure happiness.

"I am glad because you are glad, Cimburga," said the princess gently.

THE COURT JESTER

“And indeed, your Highness, I shall pray every night to Saint Joseph to send you as good a husband as I have myself,” continued the girl earnestly. Marguerite smiled at this, but after all there was many a prince who would not be so kind to his royal wife as humble Karl would be to the maiden of his choice.

At Metz they were greeted by Marguerite's brother, a handsome boy known to history as Philip of Flanders. He was about to go to that country to remain, and so we shall see very little of him in this story.

Everywhere in their own domain the emperor and his daughter had been received with every demonstration of delight by their loyal people, and at Metz they were royally entertained by the Duke of Lorraine, who caused to be given on his wonderful stage a play for their amusement.

It was a very queer theater, or at least it would look so to us to-day, and the plays produced there did not in the least resemble those we are accustomed to see.

Plays in the beginning were given in Latin, and were played in churches on Christmas, Easter, and Good Friday. But when they began to be recited in the language spoken by the people the church would have none of them, and they were performed in the open air. The stage at Metz was nine stories high, and as to whether their costumes were appropriate or the contrary was a question

A ROYAL ALCHEMIST

which seemed to trouble the actors very little, and it must have seemed rather odd to see the angel Gabriel appear in a robe that had been worn by his Satanic Majesty in a previous scene. There were a great many people in the play, which must have been very confusing, because of the comic interludes where clowns danced about performing their various antics, which had nothing whatever to do with the play itself. The piece witnessed by Maximilian and his suite lasted for three days, and Le Glorieux declared that he for one was glad when it was finished.

"But you can not see such spectacles every day," said Philibert.

"Thank fortune for that!" said the fool.

"But are you not fond of the drama?"

"Yes, and I am also fond of bread, but I should not like to eat bread every minute for three days."

At Linz they stopped to pay their respects to the old emperor, whom Marguerite never had seen, or at least not since her babyhood, which does not count. Frederick the Third was almost eighty years old now. He had given up the government of the country to his son, and had retired to his palace at Linz, where he pursued his "studies," as he called them, and which he fondly imagined them to be, though to-day his pursuits would make a boy of average intelligence smile broadly.

When Frederick was selected to be the emperor of Austria he thought over the matter for eleven

THE COURT JESTER

weeks before he could make up his mind to accept the honor thus proffered him. He never has been called a wise or a worthy ruler; quite the contrary, indeed; but the fact that he took time to think the matter over shows that he realized that the duties of his position would not be child's play, and as he had reigned for more than fifty years, it may be supposed that he was rather tired of it by this time. The emperor was a tall, white-haired old man of majestic appearance, with a heavy, protruding under lip. He kissed his son on both cheeks, and saluted his granddaughter in the same way, though without any extravagant display of affection, doubtless having his mind at the moment on his laboratory, where he was engaged in trying a number of experiments, of which writers of his day speak with a great deal of respect, not to say awe.

Wishing to entertain her royal grandfather, Marguerite asked Antoine to sing for him. The old emperor listened with a dreamy expression of countenance, as one who is absorbed in his own thoughts, and when the song was finished he asked his granddaughter and the boys to accompany him to his laboratory, where they were, of course, followed by Le Glorieux.

The laboratory was fitted up with all the appointments that could possibly be suggested by the "studies" of the great man who spent so much of his time within its four walls. There were

A ROYAL ALCHEMIST

globes and compasses, and maps of the starry heavens, for the emperor was very learned in astrology. "It was a comet that came to tell me of the birth of the King of the Romans, my son," said he solemnly. "It was necessary that a brave and wise prince should succeed me, and just before his birth a pale light was seen in the sky, which attracted the attention of learned men everywhere, and which proved to be a comet, growing larger and larger each night, reaching its greatest brilliancy on the night of my son's birth. The next night it was less bright, and before many nights it had disappeared!"

The emperor paused here, and no one remarked that this behavior on the part of comets is not unusual. Then he continued, "Until my son was twelve years of age I thought he was going to be either a mute or a fool. There was no sign of any but a very ordinary grade of intelligence, and I lost faith in the glorious predictions regarding him that I had read in the heavens. He learned his lessons only after a series of floggings, and I feared that my realm was to be governed by a weakling. But why should I have doubted the assurance given me by the planets? My son came out of his stupidity as from a dream, and he is now one of the most learned of men. He can address the ambassadors of eight different countries, each in his own language; he can dictate a number of letters at once, each in a different

THE COURT JESTER

tongue. And the stars have said that Austria will become the mistress of the world."

Although we know that the old emperor left a writing to the effect that his country would exceed all others in greatness, the prediction did not come true, showing that the stars frequently make mistakes.

The visitors examined the contents of the laboratory with great interest. The shelves contained all sorts of bottles and retorts, and the vessels in which he stirred his mixtures were marked with a red cross to keep out the demon, who, it was believed, had an inconvenient and impertinent way of meddling with such things.

The Lady Marguerite held in her hand a red rose, which was given to her by the head gardener, and which, being of a rare variety, was greatly cherished by that functionary, and thought to be a suitable gift, even for a princess. The emperor reached out his hand for the rose, and taking it from her, he popped it into a jar, where it soon became as white as snow. Then, taking it out again, he said, "It would be a pity to spoil a lady's flower," and throwing it into another jar, it became its own rich red again.

This feat seemed almost a miracle to the four spectators who witnessed it, though a chemist today would think nothing of it. To make sugar and alcohol out of an old linen shirt, to make all the colors of the rainbow, to say nothing of medi-



He popped the rose into a jar

Page 160

A ROYAL ALCHEMIST

cines and perfumes, and a substance many times sweeter than sugar, out of a thing so black and sticky and generally unpromising as coal tar, are a few of the feats accomplished by the chemists of our own time, but which would have made the alchemists of Frederick's day gasp for breath.

"Here," said the emperor, taking up a long slender vial, "is a specific for many ailments, which I have succeeded in making out of a few drops of water. And here," he went on, taking up a yellow piece of parchment covered with hieroglyphics and strange characters, "is a recipe which came to me from the Orient, and said to have been greatly prized by Hermes Tris-me-gistus." He drew out the long name to its fullest extent, and Le Glorieux whispered to Antoine, "Is it not strange that at his age he can remember such things? If I had a friend of that name and wanted to write him a letter, I could never do it in this world, for by the time I had written the first part of the name I would have forgotten the last of it. Yet this old man rattles it off as easily as if he were telling what he would like for breakfast. It must be because the Germans are used to such long words that nothing in that line staggers them."

"This tells how to make gold," said the emperor, regarding the parchment with great satisfaction. "It begins, 'Catch the flying bird and drown it that it may fly no more.' You would be puzzled

THE COURT JESTER

at the meaning of that sentence, would you not?" he asked, turning with a superior smile to his audience, all of whom murmured a respectful affirmative, save Le Glorieux, who said, "I should say it was directions as to how to prepare a fowl for the spit. Though I should advise cutting its head off, which is a much quicker and more respectable way than to drown it."

"Ha, ha!" cackled the old emperor. "Wiser men than yourself, Fool, might think the same thing. 'The flying bird' means quicksilver, which is very easy to change into gold."

"Since he knows so well how to make gold, I wonder why he is so stingy," whispered the jester to Antoine. The latter shook his head and made no reply, this being a problem too deep for him to solve.

"But the making of gold," went on Frederick, "is attended with great danger. Nature is very jealous of her riches, and conceals her precious metals in the most inaccessible spots, and in trying to make it we are likely to meet with a terrible explosive."

The emperor took a ring from his finger set with a large diamond. "This stone," said he, "is called the 'indomitable one,' for it is the hardest of all. It is the most beautiful of gems, for it has the flash of the emerald, the gleam of the sapphire, and the glow of the ruby. Around the origin of this stone Nature has woven a mystery; she has

A ROYAL ALCHEMIST

allied it to charcoal and other black substances. But I can make it by adding colors to pebbles, as I can make rubies, emeralds, and sapphires."

"Did you make the stone in your ring, Grandfather?" asked the princess innocently.

"No," replied the emperor.

"Why does he not show us one that he *has* made?" whispered Le Glorieux to Antoine, and it certainly seemed as if the proof of this statement should be forthcoming, since, "*If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, where is the peck of pickled peppers that Peter Piper picked?*" But a writer of his time assures us that Frederick actually made precious stones out of pebbles, so he must have been content to take the emperor's word for it.

"Here," said the royal alchemist, taking up a second scroll of yellow parchment, "is another formula which caused me much trouble and expense to procure. It tells how to make thunder and lightning."

The emperor, with his profound knowledge of the heavens and the secrets of the earth, was an object of too much awe to Le Glorieux to be joked with, as he was in the habit of doing, but he said to Philibert as they left their august host, "Of course, it may be a great pleasure to know how to make thunder and lightning, and a man who is fond of excitement and tired of a quiet life might do it sometimes just to amuse himself. But, speaking

THE COURT JESTER

for myself, I do not think I should like to mix up such a mess, at least not often."

It was in that same year that the emperor died, leaving Maximilian ruler in name as he had been for some time in fact. He was in possession of the domains of the Hapsburgs, as well as those of the Dukes of Burgundy, and he was served by kings and electors. Still, in spite of his exalted position, he did not become cold and forbidding in his manner, remaining frank and affable as he had been before. Writers have criticised him for his friendly ways, but after all is it not better for a ruler to be the darling of his people than always to be on his dignity, afraid to show a little human friendliness and good feeling?

The year after Maximilian became emperor he was united in marriage to Bianca Sforza, an Italian lady. When this marriage was first mentioned Le Glorieux said to the Lady Marguerite, "I can learn nothing about your new mother save that she is high-tempered, and fond of a certain kind of shellfish. It seems to me there ought to be something more to say about a woman than just that!"

The princess accepted her new mother as a matter of course. This marriage was an affair of mere business; the emperor needed money with which to fight Charles the Eighth of France, and money he would obtain by his marriage with this lady, who was far inferior to her predecessor,

A ROYAL ALCHEMIST

Mary of Burgundy, both in education and beauty. Although Frederick had claimed to have discovered the secret of turning quicksilver into gold, he did not seem to have left the recipe behind him, for the purse of his son was always gaunt and longing to be filled.

The Lady Clotilde had not returned to France, as it had been her intention to do; she had found that the climate of Austria agreed with her health to a degree little short of marvelous. She said that there were certain viands that she would not dare to touch in Burgundy, Brittany, or France, but which in the German empire did her all the good in the world. Of course, she was going away soon, next month, or surely the month after; but still the Lady Clotilde lingered on.

Philibert, finding greater advantages here for a young gentleman of rank than in his own country, also remained. It seemed that the Count de Bresse, his father, absorbed in his own schemes—and they were not always innocent ones—had almost forgotten that he owned a son, and the boy was well contented to be thus neglected, being perfectly happy in his new surroundings. In those days nations were almost continually engaged in some kind of turmoil, either fighting each other or trying to make peace, and Austria had its share of such proceedings; but at this time the principal characters of this story saw only the pleasant side of life. Antoine became more and

THE COURT JESTER

more proficient in his music; Philibert became quite scholarly at the court of this emperor, who surrounded himself with scholars; Le Glorieux amused himself and everybody else, while the princess was put under the care of her tutors, and, taking a leaf from her father's book, was always affable and gracious to her inferiors.

CHAPTER IX

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

Three years had passed. Philibert and Antoine now were tall youths, and Marguerite was a slender, graceful maiden of fifteen.

"I am sorry that she is growing up," said Cunegunda to Le Glorieux.

"Then am I to infer that you are fond of dwarfs?" asked he.

"No, but do you not see that as soon as she becomes a woman she must marry?"

"Most women do," he returned, "and most of them are equally discontented, whether they do or do not."

"And small wonder, since they must marry men," said Cunegunda. Le Glorieux could always throw her into a temper. "I did not marry again, and I am not discontented," she added.

"I have no doubt that you have made many a man discontented by refusing them right and left," said the fool politely.

Cunegunda smiled, but looked serious again as she said dolefully, "Our princess must marry and go to live in a strange land. How I wish that she were merely the child of a nobleman instead of being the daughter of the emperor; then she

THE COURT JESTER

could remain in Austria. Now she must go away."

"You are getting ready to cry again," said the jester, in an injured tone. "I am supposed to make people laugh. Even his Majesty laughs at me. But there seems to be something about me that makes you cry. If you will tell me what it is I will change it, both for your benefit and my own. That you can not see the point of a joke, no matter if it is as big as my head, is perhaps not your fault; but it seems to me that you might keep from bursting into tears every time you see me or hear the jingle of my bells."

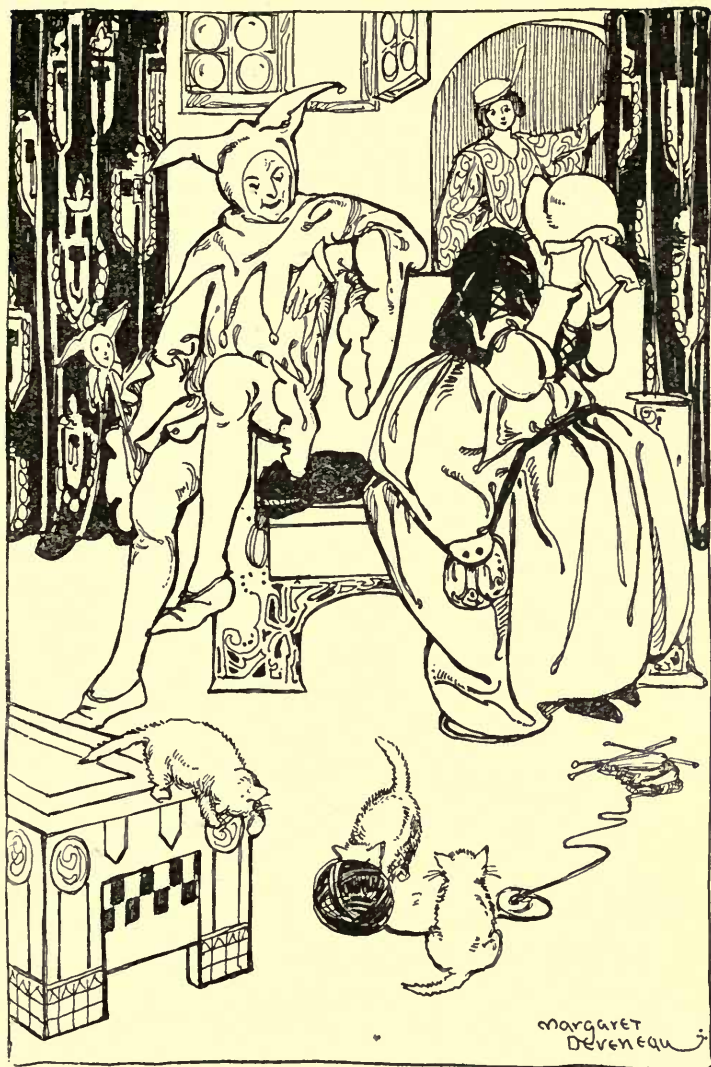
Philibert de Bresse approached; he was dressed in all the grandeur of the time, and a fine sword hung by his side. "What is the trouble with Dame Cunegunda?" he asked.

"Nothing in particular," replied the fool, "save that she wants our princess to marry a hair-dresser, or some person of the kind."

"I said nothing about a hair-dresser, and you know it!" snapped the indignant woman. "I do not want my little lady to go away to a strange country. I am now past middle age, and I am attached to my own land and do not want to leave it."

"I was not aware that the emperor was arranging a foreign match for you," remarked Le Glorieux.

Deeming this piece of satire too trivial to no-



“Something about me makes you cry” Page 168

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

tice, Cunegunda said, "I must go with my lady wherever she goes, for so I promised her mother."

"Is that promise to hold good until she is ninety?" asked Le Glorieux.

"It is to hold good as long as there is breath in my body, and she does not forbid me to accompany her."

"But there is no danger—I mean there is no prospect of the Lady Marguerite's making a foreign marriage?" asked Philibert hastily.

"I am very much inclined to believe that there is," replied Le Glorieux. "If nothing of the kind happens soon, it will not be the fault of that dark-browed Spanish envoy, Don Juan Manuel. He is quiet and cold, but he is always thinking. Not that most people are not always thinking when they are quiet, for few people's brains are swept quite empty of thoughts, but his thinking counts for something. He knows quite well what he is about, does Manuel. He is always talking to our emperor, who listens with a great deal of attention to all that he says, and whatever it is, it will be a good thing for Spain, you can make up your mind to that."

"And who is this Spaniard who has so much influence over the Emperor of Austria?" asked Philibert hotly. "He is a nobody, an ordinary Castilian, who managed to attract the attention of the Queen of Spain, afterward gaining her confidence when he became her secretary."

THE COURT JESTER

"Well, that he did gain her confidence, and that he has a good deal of influence over Max, is a fact nevertheless," returned the fool. "The young Prince of the Asturias is of the right age to marry, and will be a suitable match for our princess, and, so far as I am concerned, I am perfectly willing that they should marry, for I think that I should like to live in Spain. The climate is very fine, there would not be so much trouble in keeping warm as there is here, and I am fond of oranges."

"The Spanish match is not made yet, and how do you know that the Lady Marguerite would take you with her, even if she should go to Spain?" asked Cunegunda disdainfully.

"How do I know that she would take her shoes with her to Spain?" he inquired. "I have become a necessity to her; she could not get on without me. Besides that, I was a present to her from the Lady Anne, now Queen of France. If I was valuable when I was the present of a mere duchess, my value has increased tenfold now that I am the gift of a queen. So do not talk any more nonsense about my not going, for I shall be the first one to be considered."

"I do not want to go away to a strange country," reiterated Cunegunda, and she went away wiping her eyes.

Philibert walked slowly to the other end of the room, seeming to be absorbed in unpleasant

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

thought, and the jester followed him, chattering all the while, but getting no reply.

"Philbert, my boy," said he, "I can see that you are in a sour and unhappy frame of mind. I feel that the remark I made about the climate and the oranges of Spain has made you restless and envious. Besides that, you do not want to be separated from me, for nobody does. Now, I have a great deal of influence with my young mistress, and I will persuade her to let you go to Spain in her suite. Think of it! How fine it will be to hear the pretty señoritas tinkling their guitars, to pluck the olives from the trees—not that I care for them when they are plucked—and to see that great palace which the Spanish sovereigns snatched from the Moors; and they say there is a bedstead made from the gold that the Admiral Columbus brought from the new lands across the sea; perhaps, if we manage it right we may be allowed to sleep in that—in the bed, I mean, not the sea."

"Do not talk to me of Spain," said Philibert impatiently. "I hate the country, and I never want to see it."

"Philbert, my boy," said the fool, not at all disturbed by this outburst, "you are growing quick-tempered. I have noticed it for some time. Try to cultivate a sweet and gentle disposition. I hope I am not conceited, but really you would be more agreeable if you were more like me."

The sound of gay laughter and buzz of conversa-

THE COURT JESTER

tion was heard, and the Lady Marguerite and her ladies, followed by a number of gentlemen, entered the salon. The princess wore a gown of white, with wide sleeves that almost touched the floor; the heavy braids of her hair, wound with ropes of pearls, fell far below her waist, while a fillet of the same jewels clasped her brow. She came toward the window near which Philibert and the jester stood, and said with a bright smile, "I am very happy. My father has promised that I shall go with him to the mountains when he goes to hunt chamois. Never before would he give his consent to my going."

"To climb rocks and leap chasms after chamois would, I should think, be very entertaining pastime for a lady," said Le Glorieux. "And you will look well if your long locks should get caught in a crag and leave you suspended like a spider from its web."

"Oh, I do not intend to hunt," she replied, laughing. "We ladies will stop at the inn at the foot of the mountain, and go just a little way up to see the hunters start."

"It will be more enjoyable if Philibert and Antoine and I should go along," said Le Glorieux.

"Oh, yes; you shall go, if you like, and one of you shall get me a flower of the edelweiss from some inaccessible crag."

Señor Manuel, the Spanish envoy, now joined them, in a hesitating manner, as one who does not



"Come, Philibert, please cut this cord for me" Page 173

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

wish to intrude, yet who has something of importance to say. "I have something here that I was ordered to give to your Highness," said he. "It is a gift from his royal Highness, the Prince of the Asturias." He drew a small packet from his breast, which he placed in her hand with a profound obeisance, and withdrew without more words.

"Oh," said the princess, "I wonder what it can be!" She tried eagerly to undo the wrappings, for she was young enough to be very anxious regarding a present. Taking a seat in the window she busied herself with the cord, which she twisted into a hopeless tangle in her haste to untie it. "Come, Philibert," she called impatiently, "please cut this cord for me."

He took the package from her hand and broke the cord in his strong fingers so suddenly and so vigorously that the wrappings fell apart and a portrait fell with a sharp click to the floor.

"You must not open a package as if you were trying to throttle an assassin," said Le Glorieux reproachfully, as Philibert with an apology recovered the portrait and placed it in the Lady Marguerite's hand.

"Her Highness is unfortunate in asking the assistance of one so awkward," murmured Philibert, and with a bow he withdrew.

But Marguerite did not look at him, so intent was she in examining the portrait. "Come and see what was sent to me by Don Juan, Prince of

THE COURT JESTER

the Asturias," she said to the other ladies, some of whom were young, and all as eager to see it as herself. The portrait was painted on ivory, and was surrounded by diamonds; it was of a youth on the threshold of manhood, a gentle, pleasing face, with blue eyes and fair hair.

"I thought Spaniards were dark," said Marguerite.

"The Prince could not well be dark, since his father and mother both are fair," said one of the gentlemen, who had visited the court of Spain. "His mother, Queen Isabella, is descended from the great English House of Plantagenet, both of her parents coming from that royal family."

"So much the better if he is light," remarked the jester. "My own hair is light, being indeed of a fine reddish tinge, though the cap I wear conceals its beauty from the world, which is a pity. I never have known many Spaniards, but I am sure I should be fonder of a light-haired one than of that dark ambassador with his black hair always as smooth as glass, like the head of a snake, and who glides in and out so silently that you never see him until he stands before you."

Marguerite's ladies expressed a great deal of admiration for the picture, which they considered a very handsome face, but perhaps their opinion was biased by the fact that the original was the future king of one of the richest and most powerful nations in Europe. But Marguerite slipped

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

the portrait beneath her girdle and expressed no further opinion concerning it.

The court was now staying in the royal castle of Innsbruck in the Tyrol. Maximilian cherished a fond affection for this country, because he had added it to the possessions left him by his father. In his bedchamber at Innsbruck are to be found these lines, "I, king by the grace of God, wear the crown that I may protect the poor, and be just to all, and in order that we may all live in peace eternal."

The landlord of the The Hunter's Rest, the inn at the foot of the mountains where his Majesty went to hunt, had entertained the emperor more than once; but he was somewhat overwhelmed by the company of ladies, who now formed a part of the imperial party. Maximilian, as usual upon such occasions, was plainly dressed; he wore a green hunting suit somewhat the worse for wear, for he was not particular regarding his personal appearance when engaged in his favorite pastime of chasing the chamois. An Alpine hat with a single feather was worn where the crown of the Hapsburgs had rested, while his aristocratic feet were encased in stout hunting boots. Yes, the emperor was more like one of themselves; he was always so merry, laughing and joking with the landlord's wife, chucking the roly-poly children under their chins, exchanging a good-natured word with anybody who happened to drop in, that he won all

THE COURT JESTER

hearts, and they forgot their awe of the emperor in their admiration of the man.

But these ladies in their elegant fur-trimmed gowns and their dainty little ways,—would anything that the inn afforded be half good enough for them? The landlord soon found, however, that the greatest lady among them, the princess herself, was sweet and gracious, and she even kissed the dimpled face of the baby, an act on her part which never was forgotten, and which the child herself lived to tell to her grandchildren, always pointing to the exact spot which her good mother had informed her had been brushed by the rosy lips of her Highness, the Lady Marguerite of Hapsburg. And the other ladies were obliged to unbend in imitation of their young mistress, and so they were far less awe-inspiring than had been expected.

The ladies accompanied the hunters a little way up the mountain, until the ascent became steep and tiresome, and then they returned to the inn. There the princess, who was very fond of pets, was greatly attracted by a baby chamois, a little kid, which had been adopted by the landlord's children. He was a cunning little fellow, with bright eyes that seemed to sparkle with fun when she stroked his foolish little face and soft velvety ears. When she spoke to him he would turn his head to one side as if reflecting upon what the lady had said, seeming to be thinking very hard with a view of giving

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

a suitable reply, and then he would double himself up and roll about like a kitten.

In the meantime the emperor's party were climbing higher, an ascent which grew more and more difficult as they continued. Le Glorieux, who had hunted the chamois in the company of his late master, was acquainted with the ways of this elusive animal, which is one of the most difficult in the world to hunt. But to Philibert and Antoine the experience was new and strange. These three were a little behind the others when Le Glorieux said, pointing to the right, "There is one!"

"Oh, that," said Philibert, "is nothing but a rock. You are prepared to see a chamois in every distant object."

"I am very much mistaken," said the other, "if that is not a sentinel sent out to watch for danger, while the others may take their breakfast in peace. You have no idea what a very clever animal the chamois is. If a good many kings and emperors were half as keen to scent danger it would be a great deal better for the countries they rule."

"What is the good of a chamois being a sentinel?" asked Antoine. "If that is one he is too far away from the others to call their attention to danger."

"Not a bit of it," was the reply. "He is too clever to get too far away to give the signal; trust him to look out for that. If he should see us he would say in his way, which would be to stamp his

THE COURT JESTER

forefeet and give a shrill kind of a whistle, 'Here are some of those disgusting human beings with their bows and arrows. *Get out of their way as fast as you can, every one of you!''

One of the huntsmen now said that they would be obliged to go back and come up the other side of the gorge, as they must get above the game in order to shoot it, so they went down a steep ravine, climbing over ledges of rock and up the other side. But in the meantime the sentinel had done his duty and had informed his friends of the presence of the men with their bows and arrows, and the party, which now could see the flock, numbering some twenty animals, saw a scampering that was wonderful to behold. With a series of remarkable leaps they sprang over a gulch and climbed up rocks so steep it seemed as if no living creature could have found a footing.

Round the other way went the hunters after them, rushing pell-mell over rocks and shrubs, but all the animals escaped save one, which seemed doomed eventually to become the prey of Maximilian. Higher and higher climbed the frightened chamois, higher and higher followed the straight athletic figure of the emperor. Once when he was hunting chamois Maximilian had found himself in a position so perilous that it seemed to him that nothing but the suddenly-developed wings of a bird could possibly extricate him, but he did not remember former dangers now,

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

for he thought of nothing but the capture of the frightened creature flying before him.

Finally the hunted animal could go no farther, finding it impossible to climb higher, or to pass its pursuer in a downward flight. So there was nothing to do but to wait in trembling expectancy the death that was sure to come. The emperor seized his knife, and the chamois, as if willing at last to yield to the inevitable, seemed to lean its soft body toward the cruel blade, then fell headlong down the rocks, from where it was afterward taken by the attendants.

And thus the hunt continued, and Philibert, though he watched it with interest, had turned his mind upon the attainment of one object, and that was finding a cluster of edelweiss. Sometimes our thoughts appear to be reflected in the mind of some one besides us, and it now seemed to be the case, for Le Glorieux said, "I am not foolishly squeamish, I should hope, and I have stood up in battle and shot at men who were able to defend themselves, but I can not say that it amuses me in the least to see a chamois killed. They are such gentle things, and they make such a plucky effort to save themselves, and they look at their captor with such piteous eyes when they are stabbed, that I do not see anything enjoyable in it, though, of course, I am nothing but a fool. And, as our little princess wants a sprig of edelweiss, I shall go in pursuit of a flower instead of a chamois."

THE COURT JESTER

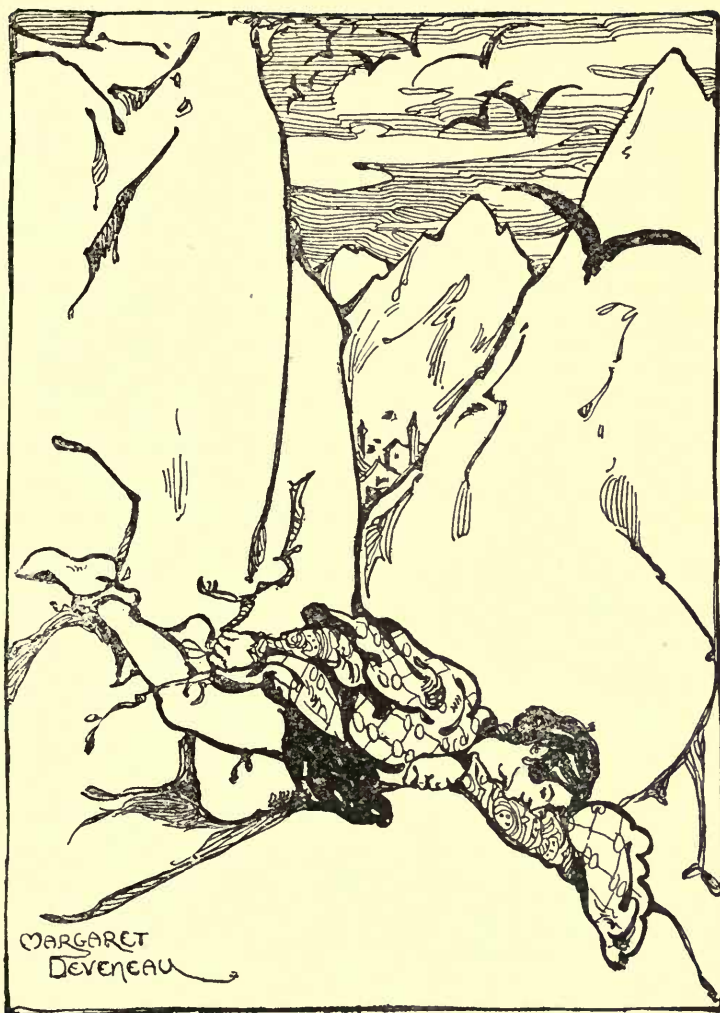
"Le Glorieux, dear Le Glorieux, let me get the flower for her," pleaded Philibert.

"What matters which of us gets it, so long as she has it?" asked the fool. "Let us both look for it, and then it will be more likely to be found."

"Very well, if you think best, but I like to do things for her, Le Glorieux. I went to the wars with my father when I was so young that I scarcely remember the love of a sister, and when the Lady Marguerite smiled at me the first night that I saw her, with a look of kindness that no one else ever had given me, I felt as if I could give up my life for her."

"She always is kind," said the jester; "she never is haughty, even to her servants. I loved her in the first place because she was her mother's daughter, but now I love her for herself. She never has a harsh word or a sharp tongue for the poor fool, and seems to remember that he has feelings as well as the rest of the world."

The edelweiss is a flower which grows upon dizzy heights, blooming under the snow. The great difficulty sometimes experienced in finding it renders it the more desirable. Philibert had seen the flower and knew that it usually grew in dangerous places; but this fact did not make him hesitate for a moment in his resolve to pluck it. After searching for some time he was at last rewarded by seeing a cluster of the snowy blossoms hanging over the edge of a dark rock some dis-



He lay for some time stunned

Page 181

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

tance below him. There was no way to reach it but to attempt a dangerous descent by climbing down the cliff to where the flowers grew. But the boy, in his eagerness to obtain the flower, did not think of the danger, and forthwith began to climb downward, finding a foothold on rough projections, and clinging to others, sliding cautiously downward, for there was a little level space just above the plant where he knew he could stand while securing it. It was a foolhardy feat, and would not have been undertaken by any but a rash youth, who gave no thought to possible consequences, and who was resolved to accomplish what he had undertaken in spite of everything. A stunted shrub grew out of the rocks some distance above the flower, and Philibert grasped it, thinking to swing himself downward. This act was his undoing, for the treacherous limb broke with a sharp snap, and the youth was precipitated downward, not to the level space beside the flower, but over it and some twenty feet down to another level space, where he lay for some time stunned and unconscious.

When he returned to his senses he was lying flat on his back on a narrow ledge of rock, and dangerously near the edge, with a little stream of blood trickling from his temple. Rising to his feet he moved his legs and arms as vigorously as possible, to see if any bones were broken, but was delighted to find that, with the exception of the cut,

THE COURT JESTER

which did not seem to be a deep one, he had sustained no serious injury.

But Philibert would have been far more comfortable and easy in his mind on safe ground with a broken arm than he was in this lonely spot, though comparatively uninjured. For the depth below him was so great that it made him dizzy to look over the edge of his resting-place, while above him the rock was so steep that not even a chamois could have climbed it. And there above him, as it had been but a short time ago below him, was the edelweiss, its flowers nodding at him impudently as if defying him to come up and take them. "I will have you yet," said he, though he felt that in the circumstances this sounded a good deal like an empty boast.

Each member of the hunting party had a horn at his side to blow in case of need, but that of Philibert was flattened by his fall, and would not give forth the faintest sound. His friends would miss him and search for him, but he had heard of people who had been lost for ever among these cold, silent mountains, and he could not help thinking that possibly this was to be his own fate, for he knew that, intent upon his search, he had wandered quite a distance from his companions, who might not know in what direction to look for him. And all this for a cluster of starlike blossoms that looked over the edge of the rock above him and nodded in derision! He put his hands to his mouth and

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

called as loudly as he could, but the rocks echoed his call and seemed to throw it back at him disdainfully and mockingly.

He repeated the call until he was tired, then he sat down quietly to think. How long could he remain here before he froze or starved to death? He had heard of life being sustained on roots and herbs, but there was nothing here but rock, and nothing above him but rock, while below him there seemed to be naught save the empty air. After a while, when the excitement caused by his new position had given way to despair, he found that the wound on his temple really did pain him, and turning quite faint he remained for a long while with his eyes closed.

After what seemed to be a very long time the sound of a horn was borne to him on the air, a sound which seemed to the lost one as sweet as the song of an angel. He rose to his feet, and, putting his hands to his mouth once more, he called three times with all his strength. An answering call reassured him, and soon hearing voices, he called again, and was overjoyed to see the faces of his friends looking over the precipice above.

"In the name of all the saints, boy," called Maximilian, "are you hurt?"

"No, your Majesty, only a little bruised."

There was the hurried buzz of conversation, which he could not distinguish, and the looped end of a rope was lowered to him, which he secured

THE COURT JESTER

about his body. Then he was slowly drawn up, and as he swung opposite the nodding blossoms, Philibert reached out his hands and grasped them, pulling them out by the roots.

"What is the matter with the boy? Is he out of his senses?" asked the emperor, who was anxiously watching the ascent to terra firma.

"No, I do not know that you could call him out of his senses exactly," replied Le Glorieux. "The Lady Marguerite wanted some edelweiss blossoms, and he was trying to find them for her. I have no doubt that he was after that very bunch when he fell. There is one thing that I have noticed about Philibert," went on the jester, "and that is that when he starts out to do a thing he will do it if it threatens every drop of blood in his body."

"He is a foolhardy youth," said the emperor. "I can understand how one could take almost any risk to kill a chamois, but not to pluck a handful of weeds." But he looked pleased, nevertheless, for he was a man who could appreciate perseverance. And he examined Philibert's wound with careful attention, saying that the two boys and the jester should return to the inn in the company of one of the guides. And Philibert de Bresse still clutched the flowers which he had risked so much to obtain.

Behind the mountaineer's hut, where the remainder of the party expected to spend the night, Le Glorieux took from the spot where he care-

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

fully had placed them, a cluster of snowy blossoms, which, with great difficulty, a scratched face, and some bruises, he had gathered before he heard of Philibert's mishap. These children of the snow he threw over the cliff unseen by his companions. "Let him have all the praise and the honor of it," said he to himself. "You are nothing but a fool, Le Glorieux, and you must not be selfish."

The princess received the flowers with a little cry of joy, and she thanked the donor with a smile so beaming, inquiring so tenderly about his wound, that Philibert felt repaid a thousandfold for the trouble he had taken to gratify her wish.

"But, my poor Le Glorieux," said the princess sweetly, "you have an ugly scratch across your face, and your hands are bruised. Have you also had a fall?"

"No, little Cousin," he returned gravely, and with a shake of the head. "The scrapings you notice on my handsome countenance and on my slender hands are but the result of a weakness with which I was born."

"You were not born with those scratches, or I should have observed them long ago," she replied, smiling.

"I said the result of a weakness, your Highness. It is my nature to want to climb. Whenever I see the side of a rock I am seized with an uncontrollable desire to scale it, and climb I must if the sky

THE COURT JESTER

falls. I always have found it the most agreeable sensation in the world to be clinging to the side of a rock with nothing over me but the blue of the heavens, and nothing beneath me but the blue of some mountain lake and with a delightful feeling of uncertainty as to just where I am to find my next foothold."

"That is an odd taste indeed," she returned, laughing, "and I do not think there are many who share it with you."

Antoine, I regret to say, was a mischievous youth, as we have seen from the trick he played on his friend the jester when they first started out on their journey together, and it may have been—though of course he would have scorned the suggestion—that some of the raps given him by the old Duchess of Burgundy were not altogether undeserved.

However that may be, he surely did meddle with something at the inn which did not concern him, as you shall presently see. That "something" was a cunning little bear. The innkeeper conducted the jester and the two boys to a rude cage constructed out of the limbs of trees, which he had placed a little distance from the house and near the edge of the forest. Within the cage was a brown bear cub which had been brought to him by a friend. This wild and woolly pet, he said, he was going to train and sell for a good round sum to a traveling mountebank, who would want to exhibit it in the courtyards of inns and before the nobility.

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

Young Master Bruin was already learning, and one felt that his education would be completed by the time he was full grown. When his master would say "Come," he would obey, and he could stand on his hind feet in a manner that was quite genteel, and he was greatly admired by the three guests of his master, who watched his performances. When replaced in the cage, he walked round and round it, and every time he came to a corner he would bow, as all bears do when caged, but Le Glorieux remarked, "I see that you have begun by teaching him to be polite, and politeness is a great thing in man or beast. There are a good many things we could learn from animals if we would only think about it, though we are so well satisfied with ourselves that we think we are the only living beings in the world who are worth considering. There are not many of us who are as faithful in our friendship as an ordinary dog, and did you ever watch a cat when she had her mind bent on getting a certain mouse? Talk about patience and perseverance! Why, if a man had as much, he could accomplish almost anything he set out to do!"

"I should like to take that little bear out and play with him," remarked Antoine, as the inn-keeper walked on ahead with Philibert.

"Just you take my advice, my young friend, and let that bear alone," said the jester, with emphasis. "The owner of the bear will teach him a number

THE COURT JESTER

of tricks, no doubt, but there is one that he will not be obliged to learn, having been born with it, and that is the art of hugging."

"Pooh!" said Antoine, "a little thing like that could not hurt me. I have played with dogs a good deal larger than that bear."

"You take my advice and let him alone, or the emperor may be asking for one of his favorite songs and find nobody at hand to sing it."

But even in this twentieth century a boy may be found once in a while who will not take good advice, though experience always teaches the wisdom of listening to older people, and Antoine allowed the good counsel of Le Glorieux to glide from his mind as drops of water roll off a duck's back, so, at the very first opportunity he could find to do so unseen, he returned to the bear's cage.

Taking the rope which the bear's master had used to lead him about, Antoine opened the door and tried to get the loop about the animal's neck. Master Bruin, as if realizing that here was some one who had no business to tamper with him, growled and gazed at the intruder with a sardonic grin, which revealed all his sharp white teeth.

"You need not look so fierce, you woolly little thing," said the boy; "you are no bigger than a ball of knitting yarn. I should be ashamed to be afraid of you." Then he dragged the rope back and held the loop open in his hand, calling, "Come, come," as the innkeeper had done. But



PHILIBERT IN DANGER

young Bruin crouched sulkily in the extreme end of his domicile, without deigning to move.

Then the boy took a long stick and poked him with it, saying, "You obstinate pig of a bear, we shall see whether you will come out or not. You have made me lose all patience with you."

The little bear now made up his mind to accept the invitation, and that, too, very swiftly and suddenly, and before Antoine had time to throw the loop over his head or even to think what to do next, the bear was upon him. Bruin scorned to bite. His talent and taste did not lie in that direction, but in the way of squeezing he was an adept. He hugged Antoine as if the boy had been a lost brother now restored to his arms after a lapse of many years. The boy thought of the dagger he wore in his belt, but in order to reach the weapon it was necessary to have the use of his arms, and both of those members were securely pinned to his side by that inconsiderate little bear, who went on squeezing as if he never meant to leave off. Antoine now was very much frightened. He was at the mercy of his foe and he was afraid that the breath would be pressed out of his body in a very short time.

He gave a shrill and ear-piercing yell which brought the innkeeper and Le Glorieux in haste from the house and opened all the windows on that side, where heads were thrust out to see what was the matter.

THE COURT JESTER

What the bear thought when he saw his master never will be known. What he did was to release his hold on the boy as suddenly as if the latter had been a hot potato, and scamper away as rapidly as his clumsy legs could carry him. The two men ran in pursuit, but their efforts were unavailing, for Master Bruin had deserted civilization forevermore.

"I warned you, did I not, to let that bear alone?" asked Le Glorieux indignantly. "Did I not tell you that he was terrible when it came to hugging? Why did you do just what I warned you not to do? People who refuse to take good advice are always sorry for it."

"I only wanted to have a little sport with him," whimpered Antoine. "I did not know that bears could hug so hard."

"You have found it out now," said the jester. "You have played our friend here a fine trick. He was keeping the bear in order to sell him at a good price, and you, in spite of everything I could say to you, must let the animal escape. It would be no more than fair for you to pay whatever he is worth to our good host and consider yourself lucky with getting off without a cuffing in addition—a punishment you deserve!"

Antoine felt the justice of this remark and emptied out the contents of his purse. But when he saw what a small sum it was, Le Glorieux relented and said gently, "Put aside your money, my



The remains of what once had been a velvet glove

Page 191

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

boy; there is not enough to bother about. You are one of our party, the emperor's and mine, and I will pay for the damage you have done." And he offered the innkeeper a handful of silver. The latter, being upright as well as good-natured, refused to take all the money offered him by the jester, merely taking what he had expected to receive for the bear, showing that honesty is a plant that will flourish anywhere, provided the ground be favorable.

The Lady Marguerite had an experience of her own with one of the pets belonging to the inn. When she and her ladies returned from their walk they were met at the door by the landlady, who was as pale and terrified as if some calamity had overtaken her. In her left hand she extended toward the princess a wet and torn object which resembled a piece of mop rag that had seen long service, but which in reality was the remains of what once had been a velvet glove embroidered with seed pearls. Under her right arm she held with some difficulty, for he was wriggling with all his might, a small puppy of the age when dogs believe that the chief object of life is to chew things, and who looked at the princess with an impudent little bark, just as if he had not been striving with all the patience and perseverance of which he was capable to reduce a piece of her property to a pulp.

"Oh, this hound, this hound, your Highness!" moaned the poor woman. "I have tried my ut-

THE COURT JESTER

most to keep him out of the way of your Highness and out of the bedchamber of your Highness! My boys and my husband, they will have every kind of an animal about, but for me I hate them all—I mean the animals, your Highness, and not my husband and my sons. And this hound, your Highness, he has been determined to go into your bedchamber at any cost, though I have driven him away from it again and again. He seems to have had nothing else on his mind since your Highness has honored this poor place with your presence. And when I went in your room this morning to put it in order, he slipped in unseen by me and remained under a chair, occupied in chewing this valuable glove just as if it had been the object of his life to feed upon pearls.”

“Never mind,” said the Lady Marguerite soothingly. “They are too small to injure him, even if he has swallowed any of them.”

“Injure him! What should I care for him?” cried the woman. “It is the loss of the glove belonging to your Highness that distresses me.”

“Oh, do not trouble yourself about the glove; I have plenty more. But what a pretty puppy, and a fine breed, too.”

“Yes, your Highness, the breed is well enough,” replied the woman sadly, as if she wished that the puppy had striven more faithfully to live up to the traditions of his race.

“I should like to have him,” said the princess,

PHILIBERT IN DANGER

"and you shall be paid whatever you think that he is worth."

"Does your Highness want a dog that has just wrought such destruction?" asked the good woman, in amazement.

"Of course, why not?" said Marguerite, taking the dog in her own arms. "You did not know that it was my glove, did you, doggie?"

"Your Highness is perfectly welcome to him for nothing at all," was the reply, but the princess insisted upon paying her a price for the small animal, which the landlady considered sufficient to purchase all the dogs in the Tyrol. And his new mistress named him Brutus, which was a very grown-up and dignified name for so small and mischievous a member of the dog family, and as he was very intelligent he became the most favored of Marguerite's pets.

When they returned to the palace at Innsbruck Le Glorieux said, "Little Cousin, we each have a souvenir of the trip; you have the puppy, your father has some fine chamois horns, Philibert has a cut temple, Antoine sore ribs, while I have a scratched face, owing to my passion for climbing."

CHAPTER X

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

The following year Maximilian found it necessary to take his troops to Italy. The cities of that fair land, instead of being friendly, as they are to-day, were constantly quarreling with each other, and Pisa, the city of the leaning tower, implored the aid of the Emperor of Austria against the pretensions of Florence, the city of flowers.

Le Glorieux, who declared that he had not seen a good rousing fight since the siege of Beauvais, begged to accompany the emperor, and to be allowed to do his full share of fighting, a permission which was granted most willingly.

Philibert de Bresse, who had industriously continued his studies, and who had gained the serious attention of the emperor for the first time when he plucked the edelweiss, was now his Majesty's secretary, and also was to accompany him to Italy. But Antoine, at the bidding of the princess, remained in Vienna, where the court was staying at the time and where, under the tuition of a musical monk, he was accomplishing wonders in the realm of melody.

Philibert was now eighteen and had attained his full growth. He wished that he was to fight in-

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

stead of to write, that he could be the soldier in armor and clanking spurs instead of the smooth-haired secretary, for he was young and longed for exciting adventure. But it was worth something to be in the confidence of the emperor, and to travel in his present capacity was better than to remain quietly at court.

They were camped near Pistoja, an ancient city at the foot of the Apennines, the headquarters of the emperor being a half-ruined marble palace. Pistoja is to this day rich in ancient sculptures of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and at that time there was an equestrian statue which stood outside the gates of the old palace, about which clung a strange superstition, which was that occasionally, and when it suited his fancy, the statue had a way of dismounting and wandering about, possibly to rest himself, for several centuries of the same position must prove fatiguing. It was not an especially fine piece of statuary and had not been done by a famous sculptor. In fact, the original of the statue had had it made in order to perpetuate his own memory, but he had lived so long ago that nobody remembered just what he had done, which perhaps were not such wonderful feats after all, for the greatest people are the most modest. It represented a man on a big horse with a long mantle spread well out over the tail of his steed, and it went by the name of *Il Capitano*, the captain, no one knowing or caring just what captain it was.

THE COURT JESTER

And this captain had thrust himself upon the notice of the emperor's soldiers camped in his neighborhood, as you shall presently see.

Coming into the grounds after having taken a message from the emperor to one of the officers, Philibert paused to speak with one of his Majesty's guards. The subject of their conversation was the expected battles of the coming campaign, and the guard said, "I am not afraid of any living man, but I am afraid of the one they call *Il Capitano*."

"You mean the statue on horseback over there?" asked Philibert.

"I do, sir."

"Why should you fear a marble man?" asked the secretary, smiling.

The guard lowered his voice. "Because, sir, he gets off his horse and walks about at night."

Philibert laughed. "A soldier should not listen to such old wives' tales," said he.

"It is not an old wives' tale, sir," said the man stoutly; "Hans and Ottocar and others who are as brave as the emperor himself, saw *Il Capitano*, and were frightened."

"I went past him a few moments ago and I was not frightened," laughed Philibert.

"But they saw him walking about in the moonlight, sir."

"They were dreaming, or they had been drinking too much Italian wine," said young De Bresse as he walked away.

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

That afternoon the emperor said to his secretary, "De Bresse, I am going to send you to Venice with a message for the doge."

Philibert's heart beat high with exultation, for he knew that this was a mission of trust, and that he possessed the emperor's confidence, else his Majesty would have selected another messenger. The Venetians had promised their aid to Maximilian and the Pisans, but so far they had failed to keep their word. The message was not to be written, lest in case of accident to the bearer it should fall into the wrong hands. The emperor repeated it to his secretary word for word, and gave the latter his seal ring to show that the message was authentic.

Repeating the words of his royal master over and over again in his mind and trying to remember his caution regarding the trip and the best route to take, Philibert hastily prepared for the journey, and mounting one of the best horses available he rode away shortly before nightfall.

He was very happy; he was young, he had the confidence of the emperor, and he was starting out on a trip in which there was considerable risk, a fact which with him added greatly to the charm of the enterprise.

It seems sometimes as if our memory takes a malicious delight in playing tricks with us. It will go to sleep at the very time that it ought to be busiest and then it will wake and mock us. What do

THE COURT JESTER

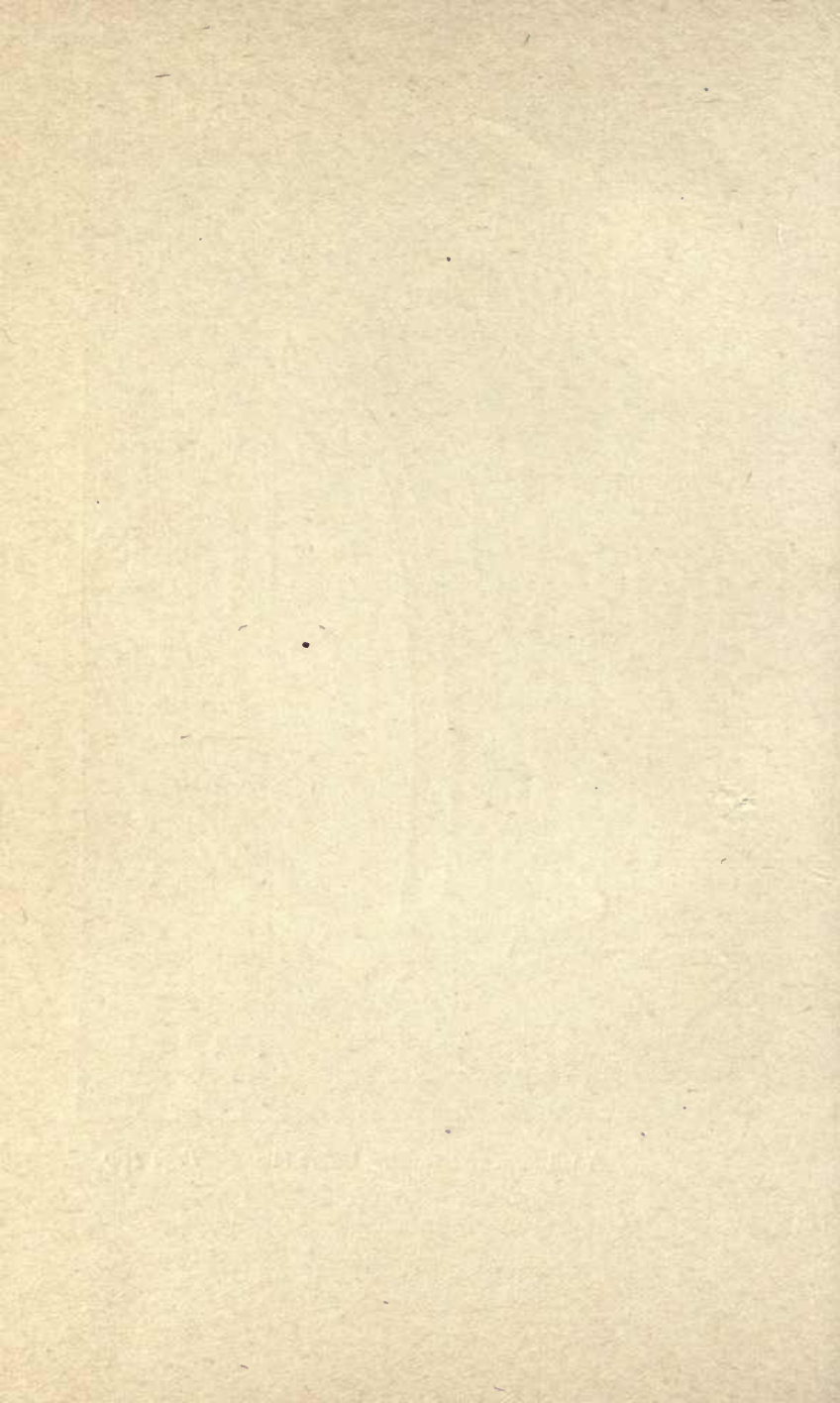
you suppose that Philibert's memory said to him, when, after a two hours' ride, he stopped at a stream to allow his horse to refresh itself with a drink of water? It was this, "*You have forgotten the emperor's ring! You left it on the foot of your couch when you were dressing!*"

This was the ghastly truth. In his excitement, delight, and haste, the secretary had placed the ring on his couch, intending to tie it to a cord and hang it around his neck inside of his clothes for the sake of safety, and it was still there! To accomplish the purpose for which he was sent, the ring was absolutely necessary, or his royal master would not have given it to him. There was nothing to be done but to return and find it. It would be very difficult to go to his room without the fact of his presence being reported to his Majesty, who, also, had sharp ears and knew all that was going on around him. And what should he say if he were discovered? Simply that he had forgotten the ring and had come back for it. Yes, that was simple enough, but to the proud and sensitive youth the consequences would be terrible, for he knew that the emperor upon learning the truth would lose all confidence in his sagacity and would send another messenger. "And small wonder, too, since his first one appears to be such a blundering idiot," he thought, with burning cheeks.

Well, he would go back for the ring and if he should be discovered by the emperor there would



A tall form was walking before him *Page 199*



A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

be nothing to do but to return to his own country in disgrace. So Philibert turned his horse's head in the direction of Pistoja.

It was the hour of midnight when Philibert approached the camp from which he had set forth so joyously that afternoon, a week ago it seemed to him now. For the last few miles he had been tormented by a fear that he could not overcome, a surmise that seemed to be more and more probable as he drew nearer and nearer to his destination. Le Glorieux had a habit of entering the secretary's room, as was the custom of jesters, at whatever hour it pleased him, and if he went there after Philibert left, he would certainly discover the ring, for his sharp eyes saw everything. And he would take the jewel straight to his master; the youth seemed to hear him saying, "Cousin Max, here is your ring that the careless boy left on his bed." Perhaps even now Maximilian had a store of wrath laid up for him!

And now how best to pass the sentinels was a serious problem. Of course knowing his identity, they would let him pass without a question, but how to bribe them to keep his return a secret? He had secured his horse in a clump of trees and was about to approach the first sentinel when he saw an object which for the moment almost stopped the beating of his heart. Plainly distinguishable in the bright moonlight a tall form was walking before him draped in a long mantle. It was the

THE COURT JESTER

statue, *Il Capitano*, which so frightened him, and Philibert was by no means a coward. Even to the bravest, the sight of a marble statue walking about when it ought to be sitting quietly astride its horse would cause more or less trepidation, for the sight is an unusual one, to say the least.

But glancing backward with the expectation of seeing the horse standing riderless, Philibert discovered that the same old *Capitano* was still in his saddle, holding his sword stiffly before him, with his long mantle still floating over the tail of his steed, as it had done for nobody knew exactly how many centuries.

Then this *Capitano* was a fraud, a base imitation! Drawing his sword Philibert strode forward and with a quick turn confronted the bold masquerader.

"Another step," said the secretary, "and I shall run you through. If you think to deceive me by this foolery, you are very much mistaken. You are one of the soldiers dressed up for the purpose of stealing from your comrades."

The man sank to his knees and began to plead for mercy. "Oh, sir, please do not betray me. I never have done such a thing before, indeed."

"Do not tell me that; you have been walking about in this guise night after night."

"I mean, sir, that I never have done anything like this until since we have been camped in this place."

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

"We will not discuss that matter now; I have no time to hear your excuses. I need your disguise for purposes of my own. Give those rags to me; promise to cease your evil practices and to keep my secret, and I will keep yours."

The rascal made the necessary promises, very thankful to get off so easily, and to extricate himself from what at first promised to be a position of great danger. Hastily doffing the long mantle and the white linen which bound his head in imitation of marble hair, he helped to array the young secretary in the disguise; then holding his sword before him in imitation of *Il Capitano*, Philibert marched boldly toward the emperor's quarters.

The sentinel at the gate made no opposition to his entrance, but remained as if frozen to the spot; another crossed himself and fled, and his way being now clear, so far as they were concerned, Philibert cautiously mounted the steps leading to the upper hall, ever in momentary fear of meeting one of the emperor's suite or perhaps even his Majesty himself, as he was obliged to pass his bedchamber in trying to reach his own. Luck favored him, however, and he reached his own room, where he proceeded to search for the object which had caused him so much anxiety.

The one window of the room was so thickly shaded with vines as to exclude the moonlight, and even if there had been any artificial light available, its use would have been a risk, so Philibert began

THE COURT JESTER

to run his hand over the couch, very slowly and carefully lest he should knock the ring to the floor, where it would be almost impossible to find it.

He uttered a sigh of relief when his fingers touched a hard object, which turned out to be what he sought, and slipping it on his finger, where it proved to be a snug fit, he was about to depart, when he heard the emperor's voice in the corridor. His disguise would not protect him from Maximilian, who, even if he should believe this strange figure to be *Il Capitano* himself, would lose no time in running it through with his sword, and the young secretary was not ready to die.

He waited; would the emperor never go? His voice was raised in anger about something. Perhaps he had heard of the appearance of the supposed statue and was seeking it. Concealing himself behind the half-open door, Philibert listened. No, whatever it was it was not a question of *Il Capitano*, and the listener realized that his successor was getting a sound scolding from Maximilian, who had a temper of his own upon occasion.

A paper was missing, the disappearance of which seemed greatly to have irritated the emperor. His voice grew louder and louder as he described it. Then he said, "Here, Le Glorieux, go and look for it in the bedchamber of De Bresse. You will know it by its color; it is a long blue paper, folded lengthwise, with writing across the end of it."

The listener knew quite well of what paper they

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

were speaking; oh, if he could only have put it into the emperor's mind to look for it in a certain drawer in his own room, where, neatly labeled, the secretary had placed it with a number of other documents! But here was the fool coming straight toward his room with a torch. With a sudden plunge, Philibert sprang toward the bed and crawled under it, dragging with him the hangings, which were old and frail, as he did so.

"What a mess this room is in," grumbled the jester, as he stumbled over the fallen hangings, coughing violently as the dust from them tickled his throat. "Was he so crazy with joy over his trip that he must pull his couch to pieces before he started?"

Then, as if suspecting that some one might be in the room who had no right there, the jester searched carefully about, finally kneeling to look under the bed. The emperor and his humiliated scribe had now closed their door, and the amazed exclamation of the jester was not heard, as he discovered a booted and spurred foot beneath Philibert's bed.

"And so, Mr. Thief, or Mr. Spy, whichever you are, I have caught you, have I?" asked Le Glorieux coolly.

"Hush!" whispered Philibert.

"I do not in the least doubt that you want me to hush," returned the fool, taking possession of the secretary's sword, which the latter held unsheathed in his hand. "There are some positions in life in

THE COURT JESTER

which people like to have a great noise made over them, and there are others in which they like to be quiet and retired. This appears to be one of the latter. You evidently do not know how to use this toy since you give it up so easily," went on Le Glorieux scornfully.

"Hush!" whispered his prisoner again. "Do not bawl so loud. It is I, Philibert de Bresse."

"In the name of all the saints in the calendar!" exclaimed the fool as young De Bresse crawled from his hiding-place. "Is this the way you execute your commission? I was proud of you, boy; I had faith in you, and now see what has come of it! Max gave you an opportunity to win his confidence for life, and you wrap yourself up in that dirty old mantle and sneak under the bed! I never so thoroughly realized that I am a fool as I do at this moment, when I find how greatly I was mistaken in Philibert de Bresse!"

"Do you suppose I am doing this of my own accord?" snapped the young secretary, engaged in securing the band of white linen which was ready to fall from his head.

"I do not see anybody forcing you to do it at the point of the sword," returned the jester dryly. "The De Bresses are a wild lot and have done many strange things, according to their history, but I never heard of one that was a coward."

Le Glorieux had no sooner finished the sentence than Philibert seized him by the shoulders and

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

gave him a shaking which, the fool afterward declared, changed the relative position of some of his teeth. "Listen, you idiot," hissed the young man, "I intend to go to Venice if seven thousand demons stand in the road! I was well on my way when I found that I had forgotten the emperor's ring, and I have returned for it in the disguise of *Il Capitano*. Do you not see that I was obliged to come in secret? Now let me go. The paper you will find in the drawer of his Majesty's writing case. Leave me!"

The jester returned to his master, saying as he opened the door, "Cousin Max, you are a sensible man about some things even if you are an emperor, and I want to ask you where a valuable paper should be but in your own writing case?"

Waiting until all was quiet outside, Philibert ventured forth once more, and assuming the dignified stride of *Il Capitano*, he marched past the sentinels, threw off his disguise, and mounting his horse, was once more riding toward Venice, regretting the lost time, and censuring his own thoughtlessness which had rendered his return necessary. It was long after sunrise before he felt justified in taking a rest, stopping at a wayside inn more for the sake of his horse than for his own comfort. "Poor fellow," said he, stroking the tired steed, "you are unfortunate in being obliged to suffer for the folly of your rider."

And now he slipped the ring from his finger and

THE COURT JESTER

secured it on the inside of the lining of his cap, believing that after all it would be less likely to be found in that place of concealment than tied about his neck.

As soon as possible he resumed his journey, which he pursued without incident of note until late that afternoon, when he met a party of Florentine soldiers, who stopped him.

"An Austrian spy," said one of them.

"Do I look like an Austrian?" asked Philibert scornfully.

"Who are you, then?"

"A Savoyard student."

"What is a Savoyard student doing here?"

"A student may travel where he pleases, may he not? I can not see that I am accountable to you for my acts."

"Where are you going?"

"To Padua."

"For what purpose?"

"My good sir," drawled Philibert, "for what purpose does a student go to Padua save to attend its famous university, which has sheltered the learned heads of Dante and Petrarch?"

"He looks like a student and he talks like one," said another man. "Let him go."

Philibert was feeling greatly relieved when he caught the eye of a man in the rear of the company. This was a soldier, who, in a slight skirmish a short time before, had been taken prisoner by the Aus-



He met a party of Florentine soldiers *Page 206*

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

trians, and who had succeeded in effecting his escape. The young secretary had seen him but once and that only for a few moments, but he never forgot a face and recognized this one immediately. He hoped that the memory of the soldier was less faithful than his own, but this did not appear to be the case.

"Stay," said the man; "I think I can tell you something about this youth. The Emperor of Austria has a secretary, a young Savoyard, of whom I caught a glimpse when I was their prisoner, and if I am not very much mistaken this is he."

The youth laughed contemptuously. "For a faithful secretary, I seem to be quite a distance from my master," said he. "Look at me well, my good man," he continued boldly, "and tell me on your honor if we ever have met before."

The man began to waver. "Of course I had only a glimpse," he stammered. "The secretary was walking with the emperor and I only saw them a moment."

"Would you recognize the emperor if you should see him again?"

"Aye, that would I."

"Then it must have been he at whom you were staring instead of my countryman, the secretary, and of whom you seem to have received a very faint impression."

As if realizing the force of this argument, the man made no reply, and another said, "It will do

THE COURT JESTER

no harm to search him at any rate, for if it should be the emperor's secretary, he may be bearing important despatches."

Still putting a bold front on the affair, Philibert leaped to the ground. "Search me, if you like," said he, "and get it over as soon as possible, for I must be on my way." The soldiers searched thoroughly, but of course found no papers, and the youth appreciated the wisdom of the emperor in sending a verbal message to the doge. His cap they merely glanced into and restored to him, so the precious ring was safe. He remounted his horse, even before he received permission to do so, and the soldier who had first spoken to him said sneeringly, "Go, gentle youth, you are too girlish to do any harm."

Considering the danger he was in, the secretary should have ridden away without another word, but this contemptuous remark kindled his indignation to such a heat that he forgot all prudence, and crying, "How do you like this from a 'girlish' hand?" he struck the speaker full across the face with the flat of his sword, leaving a mark that would be noticeable for some time to come, and putting spurs to his horse, he dashed past the other men and galloped away. Some of the men roared with laughter, but he who had been struck rushed for his horse, mounted it and endeavored to give chase, but Philibert had the advantage of an earlier start and a swifter horse, and though a shot

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

came flying after him, it cut the limb of a tree above his head and he escaped unharmed.

The journey to Venice at this time involved days of wearisome riding, but he met with no further adventure and in due course of time arrived there in safety. The Queen of the Adriatic seemed like a fairy city when the young Savoyard first beheld it. Its palaces of beauteous tints, its waters like molten gold in the rays of the setting sun, its gondolas with their picturesque rowers, its fair women leaning against their silken cushions as they glided on the Grand Canal, and with it all the tinkling of lutes and voices of sweetest melody floating on the soft breeze, invested the scene with a charm which was like that of a beautiful dream from which he feared to awaken.

The doge's palace, with its white and red marble walls, its cloisters and great balconied windows, was reached at last, and Philibert's request, accompanied by the ring, to see the doge himself, admitted him to the presence of that haughty individual, who carefully listened to the message, not one word of which the secretary had forgotten, and gravely replied that the answer would be given later, as the matter was one that required serious reflection and consultation with his advisers, who never decided in haste.

So Philibert had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with this attractive city, and he stepped into his gondola once more, anxious to become one

THE COURT JESTER

of the merry throng and to make the most of his spare time.

Many glances of curiosity and interest were cast by the Venetian ladies at the handsome young stranger, who, in his own mind, was comparing them, to their great disadvantage, to a certain princess far off in the imperial palace of Vienna.

When the reply of the doge was handed to him on the following morning, Philibert lost no time, but departed at once, as became a trusted messenger, though it was with regret that he turned his back upon Venice and its many attractions. Nothing of moment occurred on the return journey, and although the emperor was not pleased with the answer he received, for the Venetians flatly refused their aid, still the reply prevented a certain move he had planned, and was most timely.

Maximilian complimented his young secretary upon the fidelity and care with which he had accomplished his errand. Praise from such a source was most gratifying to its recipient, although he felt that it was not altogether deserved. He had been careless at the outset, and in his code of honor it was almost as bad to act as to tell a lie. He had regretted the falsehoods he had been obliged to tell the Florentine soldiers, but in that case not only his own life, but a matter of vital importance to a nation was at stake. Now, however, he resolved not to accept in silence compliments that were not his due.

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

"I was not altogether faithful, your Majesty," said he. "I was careless at first; I went away and forgot the ring and lost at least five hours' time in returning for it."

"How did it happen that I knew nothing of your return?" asked the emperor, frowning.

"None knew of it, your Majesty, excepting Le Glorieux, who would not betray me even to you, and one poor soldier who was not sufficiently familiar with my face to recognize me."

"I seem to be blessed with capable sentinels," observed Maximilian sarcastically.

"Your sentinels are not afraid of flesh and blood, your Majesty; they fear only the supernatural." Then the secretary told the whole story of his masquerade as *Il Capitano*, not without many misgivings as to the result of the revelation.

The emperor scowled at first, then he began to laugh, and the more he thought about it the louder he laughed, for after all the messenger had done what he was sent to do, and that better than most could have done in his place, so why not enjoy the humorous side of it, now that it was all over and done with? And as hearty laughter and punishment never go hand in hand, Philibert felt that he was forgiven.

"But I find it hard to forgive you," he afterward said to Le Glorieux, "for taking it for granted that I was a coward before giving me an opportunity to explain."

THE COURT JESTER

"When a man who has been sent on a dangerous journey is found some time after he is supposed to have started, snugly hidden under his own bed, it looks, to say the least, somewhat suspicious," replied the fool. "How was I to know that you had dressed up and were capering about in a masquerade?"

The young man smiled. "Perhaps you had reason to believe as you did, for appearances were against me," said he. Then after a thoughtful pause he said, "My good Le Glorieux, that was not the first time you had seen me masquerading. Do you remember Saint Monica and the accusation of Cimburga?"

"Do I remember it? Does a man ever forget a thing like that?" asked the jester.

"Le Glorieux, did it never occur to you that I was Saint Monica on that occasion?"

"You! Are you out of your mind, my lad?"

"My friend," said Philibert, "I did not think that the saint would move, and I was anxious to have the girl's innocence proven."

"Why should you have been anxious about the girl?" asked the fool.

"Because I had heard a prayer that I wanted answered. I saw the Lady Marguerite kneeling in the chapel before the altar, and in her clear, sweet voice she was praying for Cimburga, who she believed was innocent. I, too, believed in her innocence, for I had learned something about my

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

cousin's nervous ways, and had made up my mind that she had lost the jewel in some other manner. I slipped some gray, colorless drapery from the housekeeper's room, and removing the statue from the pedestal, which was not difficult to do, I arrayed myself and played the part. There was, I imagine, a good deal of difference between my appearance and that of the saint, but every one was too agitated to notice it. And as the girl was really clear of all blame in the matter, who knows but that the saint helped her in another way, and, knowing that her wooden image could not move, put it into my head to do as I did?"

"And I called you a carp!" exclaimed the jester.

CHAPTER XI

THE LADY MARGUERITE IS VERY BRAVE

The campaign in Italy at this time proved to be a failure, and the emperor returned with his troops to Austria.

"I have always thought I should like to ride through the streets with a laurel wreath on my brow and hear the people screeching with delight at the very sight of me," said Le Glorieux, "but I always happen to be on the other side when a victory is won."

Being sent to attend to some matters for his royal master, Philibert was detained for a week in the Tyrol, and when he arrived at the palace in Vienna the first person he met was one of his cousin's women, who told him that her mistress wished to speak to him at once.

The Lady Clotilde had changed not at all during her stay in Austria, and she received her young kinsman with a relaxation of her usual dignity that surprised him. "My dear Philibert," she said, kissing him upon both cheeks, "I congratulate you upon your improved prospects."

"My improved prospects? Has the emperor——"

LADY MARGUERITE VERY BRAVE

"Oh, no, the emperor has nothing to do with what I am speaking of. Of course, death is a terrible thing, but people must die, and even if we wish they could be spared, it makes no difference."

"My dear cousin," said Philibert patiently, "will you not tell me who is dead and why I should be congratulated?"

"Who should it be, you thoughtless boy, but the Duke of Savoy, and your father was the heir to the title. You are the future Duke of Savoy! You are a personage of importance!" and she kissed him again. "Think of what a fine marriage you may now make!"

Philibert blushed at her words, but his eyes shone with a new light. "I had not heard of our new dignity," he said. "I shall doubtless find a letter when I go to my room."

"And, my dear boy, I have news of my own to tell you," went on the Lady Clotilde, simpering. "I suppose I should have waited until your return, and I should have notified my other relatives, but I always was so romantic. Philibert, I have married again."

"*What!*" cried the young man, in amazement.

"I do not see why you are so surprised," she returned coldly. "You could not seem more astonished if you had seen a ghost. Why should I not marry if I feel so inclined?"

"Why not, indeed? I beg your pardon, Cousin. Who is the happy man?"

THE COURT JESTER

"It is the Spanish attaché, Don Geronimo Bartolomeo Zurriago y Escafusa," she returned, saying the long name with a good deal of pride. "He owns an estate in his own country to which he would have returned long ago if—well, if there had not been attractions at the court of Austria."

"I hope you will be very happy, Cousin," said Philibert, excusing himself as soon as it was possible, for he wanted to be alone and think of all that his new dignity might bring to him.

Leaving the Lady Clotilde's apartment, he met Le Glorieux, who was bubbling over with news. "So many things have happened, even in the week since we returned," said the jester, "that it seems to me it will take a week to repeat them. In the first place, Clotilde is married."

"So she has just informed me."

"When I heard it," went on the jester, "I was so surprised that it almost made me ill. But the people who marry, and especially the other people they select to marry, is a mystery I never could solve."

"The Lady Marguerite is well, I hope?" asked Philibert.

"Yes, and happy and fair as a flower, and her stepmother is still high-tempered and fond of shellfish. But that is not news. First I will begin with Antoine. He has distinguished himself greatly in the way of singing, and the emperor has made him one of his own musicians. And the rascal,

LADY MARGUERITE VERY BRAVE

who has grown wonderfully during the last few months, is almost as tall as I am, and he is very proud of his new uniform. And next, great doings have been going on in our negotiations with Spain! As I remarked to you once before, if you will remember, our friend Manuel works quietly, but he works hard."

"What do you mean?" asked the secretary, turning pale. "You do not mean that she is going to Spain?"

"If you will not use names, of course I can not be expected to know about whom you are talking," replied the fool. "But a certain 'she' is coming from Spain. The Princess Juana is coming with a great fleet to be the daughter-in-law of Maximilian and the wife of the Archduke Philip."

"You do not mean to tell me that all this has been planned in a week?" asked Philibert, with a sigh of relief.

"No, it has been going on for some time, but we have only known about it within the last week. You see, even his secretary does not see all the letters Max receives and sends away. But there is still more to tell you."

"What, more?" laughed his listener.

"Yes, and most important of all. Cunegunda has been crying her eyes almost out."

"Do you call that news?"

"No, I do not know that I can call that part of it news. The very first thing that woman did when

THE COURT JESTER

she saw me was to burst into tears," went on the jester in an injured tone. "I appeal to you, I appeal to any man, if there is anything mournful in my appearance? If I went about clothed in crape I could not have a sadder effect upon her than I do in my jester's suit. She said she was crying because she was afraid something was going to happen, and the next day when I saw her she cried because it had happened. You see she had lost no time, but had begun to weep in good season."

"I wonder if you have heard my news,—that my father has succeeded to the dukedom of Savoy?" asked the other as the jester paused.

"Yes, I have heard it, my boy, and I congratulate you with all my heart," said the fool hastily. "It is a fine inheritance, and one day you will be Philibert the Second, Duke of Savoy. Accept my felicitations."

"Thank you. And you see, Le Glorieux, there is quite a difference between the heir of the Count de Bresse and the heir of the duke of a wealthy province, and I feel that I can hope—well, I can hope for almost anything."

"Hope," said the jester gravely, "is one of the finest things in this world, and I wish we all had more of it. But you have not asked me what made Cunegunda weep."

"No," said Philibert absently, as one whose mind is traveling far afield; "what did make Cunegunda weep?"

LADY MARGUERITE VERY BRAVE

“Because,” replied the jester, “she has the narrowest mind of any woman living.”

“And she is only beginning to find it out?” asked the other, laughing.

“Oh, she has not found it out, and never will, though I have known it from the beginning of our acquaintance. Now I ask you, why should not Spain be a good country to live in? There are flowers and palaces and oranges and bull-fights and everything to make a man or woman comfortable, and there are plenty of new friends, I dare say, if one cares to make them; still that woman is drowned in tears because she must go there, as if it were purgatory.”

“Why must she go to Spain if she does not care to do so?” asked Philibert.

“Because she will not leave her young mistress,” replied the fool deliberately.

“You do not mean——”

“Yes, I do mean just that. As I have said before, Manuel has worked hard, and the same fleet that brings the Spanish infanta to our shores will take away our own little princess to be the bride of the young Prince of the Asturias, only son of Ferdinand and Isabella, and heir to the kingdoms of Castile, and Leon, and Aragon, and I can not tell how many other countries. And I am going with her, and so is the weeping Cunegunda, and a large suite of ladies and gentlemen.” And thus chattering, and without casting another glance at Phil-

THE COURT JESTER

bert de Bresse, heir to the dukedom of Savoy, the jester left the room.

The Lady Marguerite, who had grown still more fair to look upon during his absence, received Philibert with a cordial greeting, and with a word of congratulation upon his new dignity, as future ruler of Savoy.

He replied, "You are very kind, your Highness, but in a world full of sorrow and disappointment, rank and wealth are of little account."

"You speak as mournfully as one who is about to become a monk," she returned in a tone of surprise.

"Such a step on my part is not improbable, your Highness," was the reply.

Some days later, the princess said to Le Glorieux, "Philibert de Bresse has not been the same since his return from Italy. What spell was cast over him in that country?"

"Almost any question can be solved," said the jester, with a wise look, "if one will sit down and think it out quietly. I have wondered for a long time why the climate of Austria has agreed so well with Clotilde, and I find that it was all owing to Don Geronimo Bartolomeo Zurriago y Escafusa. Is it not wonderful how well I recollect that name? And the beauty of it is that once learned I shall never forget it."

"What has all that to do with Philibert de Bresse?" asked the princess.

LADY MARGUERITE VERY BRAVE

“That has nothing to do with him, of course; I am simply leading up to him. This is what I have figured out for Philibert. Of course he knows that he must marry some time; few men can escape matrimony. When he was plain future Count de Breese he had a wider selection of ladies with whom he might wed. Now that he is the future Duke of Savoy, there is a smaller number from whom he may choose; for, though I never could see the justice of it, there always is more milk than there is cream.”

“He is very young to be thinking of such things,” said Marguerite coldly.

“When you come to age, he is no younger than your noble brother, who is to wed the Princess Juana; or the young heir of Spain, who is to wed a certain princess of my acquaintance, a lady not quite sixteen. Let us suppose that Philibert had his mind fixed upon some maiden, who was in his own rank when he was simply to be a count, then, suddenly, he pops up into the circle of dukes, where he must look down upon her. It is enough to make any man gloomy.”

“Sometimes you talk in a very sensible manner, Le Glorieux,” said the Lady Marguerite, frowning, “but to-day you speak nothing but nonsense.” And she walked away with her head held high as was always the case when she was out of temper.

Looking after her slender figure as it disappeared through an archway, the jester muttered to

THE COURT JESTER

himself, "Not to contradict a princess of the blood royal, I want to say that I never was more sensible than I am at this very moment."

One summer day a gallant armada set sail for the coast of Flanders. It consisted of one hundred and thirty fine vessels, and it was manned by hundreds of sailors; it carried the chivalry of Spain, and it was commanded by the Admiral of Castile. Never had so beautiful a fleet sailed from the Spanish coast, for it brought to Philip of Flanders, the son of Maximilian, his bride, the Infanta Juana.

The people were eager to see the bride of their prince, but if they had expected a beauty, they were disappointed. Juana was pale and delicate in appearance, and, as a French writer of the time expresses it, "a somber fire seemed to burn in her eyes."

"We shall send Spain a far handsomer bride than she sent to us," said Le Glorieux exultantly.

The wedding of Philip and Juana took place in Lille with great pomp and ceremony, and the fleet waited, for it was to take another royal bride on its return trip. But many of the vessels needed repairs after their stormy voyage, and it was some time before they were ready to sail.

Philibert de Bresse, in the meantime, had received news of the death of his father; and, taking leave of his friends at court, he returned to his own country, of which he was now the ruler.

LADY MARGUERITE VERY BRAVE

A little princess saying farewēll to her parents to go to a strange land where she must remain as long as she lives, is one of the pathetic sides of history; but Marguerite, although very sad at the thought of leaving her adored father, endeavored to be resigned and even cheerful. Before the day of her departure there came a messenger from Savoy with a little packet for the princess. It contained a locket in which was set in diamonds and emeralds an edelweiss, accompanied by the following words, "The name of this flower signifies 'noble purity,' a fitting gift for this fair daughter of the Hapsburgs."

After all Marguerite was little more than a child, and she could not but look forward with pleasure to the coming voyage, since if one must leave one's native land, it is good to sail away with a splendid fleet. But Cunegunda was inclined to take a gloomy view of the coming journey. "When you travel by land," said she, "you may be killed, of course, but even in that case, you are there in plain view and can be seen; but if you are drowned, why, where are you?"

"In the bottom of the sea, where you are every bit as comfortable as you would be on land, if you were dead," said Le Glorieux.

"It is a very dangerous trip, and I weep whenever I think of it," said the good woman.

"You weep when you do not think of it, so what difference does it make?" asked the jester. Brutus,

THE COURT JESTER

who now was full grown and a hound of extraordinary intelligence, looked at Le Glorieux and wagged his tail, as if fully approving of this sentiment. "It is true, is it not, my friend Brutus, that Cunegunda never misses a chance to cry?" asked the fool, patting the dog's head.

"I know something that will make you cry," said Cunegunda maliciously.

"You could not make me cry, my good lady," replied he. "Think of all for which I have to be thankful: I am still young, I am handsome, I am going to Spain, the land of bull-fights, flowers, and oranges. My little princess is going to marry one of the finest princes of his time, and we shall all be happy, even you, for wherever you are you can always find something to cry about; and weeping is your favorite occupation."

"The Lady Clotilde is going to Spain with us," said Cunegunda slyly.

"You do not mean it!" exclaimed the jester, considerably dismayed.

"But I do mean it. You might have known that her husband would some time take her to his native country."

"Yes, but not at this time," cried the fool excitedly. "Why must she go on this particular voyage? Why is it always convenient for Clotilde to start out just as I am going? She will miss some article that she owns, and every ship will have to be searched for it. Is it not strange the way things

LADY MARGUERITE VERY BRAVE

come about in this world?" he continued complainingly. "I love that little rascal of an Antoine, and he is to remain here. I am fond of Pandora and Pittacus, though they always treat me with cold indifference, and they must be left behind; but Clotilde, whom I would gladly spare, goes with me!"

With this double marriage Austria was making a precious gift to Spain—she was giving the great possessions of the Hapsburgs, but the fairest gift of all was the young princess, whose departure drew out a great concourse of people. With flags flying and pennons waving, the ships were waiting, the largest and the handsomest for the Lady Marguerite and her suite. The picture of the princess that remained in the memory of those who saw her on that day was a slight, graceful figure standing where the sunlight shone full on her sweet young face, and with one hand resting on the head of her hound.

Then the great fleet fluttered away like a flight of huge butterflies, skimming southward.

"I do not see why I should feel so melancholy," said Le Glorieux, going inside and sitting with his head on his hands and his elbows on his knees. "Austria was not my native country; I was born in old Burgundy, and it is too late to be sniveling at parting from Burgundy. It is because I have parted with that little villain of an Antoine that I am like this. When I saw the little wretch smil-

THE COURT JESTER

ing at me from the shore, and waving his hand and blinking his eyes, as if he were trying to keep back the tears, what must this tough old heart of mine do but climb right into my throat and try to choke me to death. A heart that has served me well for all these years to play me a trick like that!"

"Will you please rise?" said a cold metallic voice at his elbow. Glancing up Le Glorieux beheld Don Geronimo, the husband of the Lady Clotilde. The jester's gaze traveled up the tall, thin form of the Spaniard until it reached his face, which was dark and reminded the fool of tanned leather.

"There being no particular reason why I should rise, I shall not rise until it pleases me to do so," said he.

"Permit my servant to take those cushions which are beneath you," said Don Geronimo icily. "You are sitting on a whole pile of them. They are wanted for my wife, the Doña Clotilde, who is overcome."

"I will give anything to any lady at any time," said the fool, rising, "but I should like to know what has overcome your lady wife so soon."

"Parting from her friends," replied the Spaniard, following his man, who was loaded down with cushions.

"She did not care as much for the whole of Austria and Flanders as I cared for that miserable little Antoine," grumbled the fool; "yet she must

LADY MARGUERITE VERY BRAVE

be packed away in cushions that are jerked from under my very body to make her comfortable. And our princess is so bravely bearing the parting from her father, and is giving no trouble whatever! Any one would think it is Clotilde who is being sent away in such state by Austria."

The first day out it seemed as if the voyage was to be a calm and safe one. When the novelty of gazing at the blue waters had worn off, the princess and her ladies took their embroidery frames and passed their time with their needles, laughing and chattering together. As soon as she had ceased to be overcome, the Lady Clotilde joined them. When the conversation turned to the perils of the ocean, she declared that she, for one, did not fear them, being a true representative of a family that knew no fear. She related a number of incidents when, according to her story, she had stood within the very jaws of death without the slightest thrill of fear.

Le Glorieux, who was sitting at the feet of his young mistress playing with the silk-and-gold threads of her embroidery, remarked, "That is because you spend so much of your time in pious reading, Cousin Clotilde. Did you bring with you the silver book about the saints?"

The princess tried to frown at him, but he saw the twinkle of a smile under her long, dark lashes.

But these were the last peaceful hours they spent for many days. In the darkness of the night the

THE COURT JESTER

storm demon came forth, shrieking in the wind, and beating the waves into fury, holding the ships a trembling instant on the crest of the wave, then dashing them into the trough of the sea, sending some of them down to destruction.

Half dressed, the passengers of the Lady Marguerite's ship rushed out into the salon. They forgot that they were the great ones of the earth and that to them had been given the honor of escorting a princess to her bridegroom. They knelt on the floor, and moaned, and told their beads, just as so many peasants might have done.

The Lady Marguerite was calm, though very pale; close beside her stood Le Glorieux, self-possessed, but no longer jesting. "If the good God is ready to take me now, I could not have a happier death than to go down with my little princess," said he.

Cunegunda held her lady's hand, which, forgetting her own danger, she stroked, with words of endearment, while Brutus crept to her feet, and putting his head on her lap, looked into the face of his mistress as if to say that he, too, was ready to die with her.

The storm did not abate with the approach of day, nor did it cease the next day, nor for many days, and it seemed as if their ship must be rent to pieces by the combined forces of wind and wave.

Once Le Glorieux seized Cunegunda by the shoulders and bawled into her ears, "You are al-

LADY MARGUERITE VERY BRAVE

ways crying; cry now, when there is some reason for it." But strange to say, Cunegunda shed no tears, though the Lady Clotilde shrieked and wept continuously, seeming to forget all the traditions of her family.

When learning that a number of the vessels had been lost, and that none could tell at what moment her own ship would go down, Marguerite put certain jewels on her fingers, neck, and arms that had long been in the possession of the house of Hapsburg. "The body of a princess is not different from that of a peasant," she said to her faithful attendants, "and it may be that the fury of the storm will spare me some of these jewels; so that if I am washed ashore I shall be identified." Then she smiled to keep up the courage of the others and said, "It seems that with all the planning of nations I am never to be a wife."

Then taking a slip of paper she wrote upon it two lines, which she wrapped in a piece of oiled silk and fastened to her bracelet. These lines, written in French, may be translated as follows, "Here lies Marguerite, a noble maiden, who, though given two husbands, died a maid."

But even a storm at sea can not last for ever, and the stout ship, being mercifully spared, arrived at last with the remainder of the fleet in safety at the port of Santander.

CHAPTER XII

AN AUSTRIAN PRINCESS AT THE SPANISH COURT

Up from the south came the young Prince of the Asturias to meet his Austrian bride. His greeting was in accordance with the strictest rules of Spanish etiquette, but all were favorably impressed by his gracious affability and by the gentle dignity of his manner.

Under the eye of his thoughtful mother, this prince had been carefully educated to be the ruler of his country. As a child he was attended by pages of his own age, and they formed mimic councils and played at being grown-up rulers. He had been taught fencing by a celebrated swordsman, and at night his sword always hung at the head of his bed. When only twelve years of age he had been knighted on the battlefield by King Ferdinand, his father. He could paint and draw, and he could play on several different instruments, for Queen Isabella was determined that her son should be one of the most accomplished princes of his time.

The prince was accompanied by his royal father, and the Lady Marguerite and her suite were escorted in great state to the old city of Burgos.



Never had preparations so grand been made *Page 231*

AT THE SPANISH COURT

Here they were met by the queen and the Spanish court.

The steed ridden by Queen Isabella was covered with crimson cloth richly embroidered with gold. Her saddle was like a chair of state, and she seemed as if seated on a moving throne. She was still a handsome woman, with gold-tinted hair and soft, earnest eyes. Following her, and mounted on richly-caparisoned mules, were scores of court ladies who seemed to have competed with each other in the magnificence of their costumes. With other high dignitaries of the church came the queen's confessor, Ximenes, Archbishop of Toledo. This stern man was clothed in all the splendor of his office, but underneath these elegant robes, we are told, was haircloth which scraped his flesh, already bruised by the frequent beatings which he gave himself with a whip.

History tells us that Queen Isabella had taken great pains to arrange the meeting of the royal family with the Austrian princess, and that she had planned just who was to kiss and who was to embrace the young stranger, but however this may be, the ceremony passed off in a satisfactory manner, and the Lady Marguerite was quite charmed with her new mother.

Never had preparations so grand been made for royal nuptials as were arranged for the wedding of the Prince of the Asturias with the Lady Marguerite of Hapsburg. There were present grandees

THE COURT JESTER

representing the chivalry of Spain, men who had distinguished themselves on the battlefield and in the tournament; there were ambassadors from the courts of all the civilized world; there were dignitaries from all the cities of Spain, there were great ladies in glittering apparel, and the king and queen in their mantles of state; but most interesting of all was the young prince, whom his people already loved, and his fair young bride.

Dressed in his gayest suit, Le Glorieux stood where he could obtain the best view of his young mistress. At the most interesting moment, just as the ceremony was about to begin, there was a buzz of excitement around him, and Don Geronimo whispered in his ear, "Will you stand aside? I am looking for the pomander-box of Doña Clotilde, which has dropped to the floor." But the fool folded his arms and pretended not to hear.

And then followed days of fêtes and tourneys and tilts. The Spanish people enjoyed these amusements in a dignified and even a serious manner, and when the princess and her suite laughed and clapped their hands at some particularly clever feat, the courtiers of Ferdinand and Isabella were shocked at such levity.

When the public rejoicings were over the prince and princess went to their palace at Salamanca, a city of beautiful creamy stone, built on three hills and in a horse-shoe shape, which, with its stately college of seventeen thousand students, gave many

AT THE SPANISH COURT

fêtes and outdid itself in bull-fights to celebrate the coming of the youthful pair.

It is said that one of the first acts of Prince Juan was to engage professors and performers of music, both instrumental and vocal, who, with fiddles, organs, cymbals, hautboys, and other instruments, played the lively airs of Spain. He also had a large military band, and one afternoon when Le Glorieux was lounging in the window listening to its music, the princess entered the room. She wore a splendid gown with a very long train, and she looked quite tall and stately. It was the first time the jester had seen her alone since their arrival in this country, and he sprang to his feet, exclaiming, "Little Cousin——" just as he had addressed her since the beginning of their acquaintance. But the Princess of the Asturias held her head higher and eyed him coldly, without making a reply.

Very much chagrined at this treatment, for she ever had been most gracious in her manner toward him, the fool turned and was about to leave the room without another word, when he was startled by a merry laugh.

"Did I do it well?" she asked gayly.

"You did it too well! I was already homesick, and if you had turned to ice like the people of this country, I should have been broken-hearted. Never was there a place so stiff and cold as this Spanish court. The king is shorter than the queen

THE COURT JESTER

and is not very big to look at when you come to stature, but I would no more think of jesting with him, as I always did with Max, than I would think of sitting down to have a little fun with my grandmother's tomb. And I am not a man who is easily chilled, either!"

"I am told," said the princess, "that I am too careless and gay, and that I must be like the ladies of Spain. And although I am allowed to retain my own people about me, they must all conduct themselves in a grave and ceremonious manner."

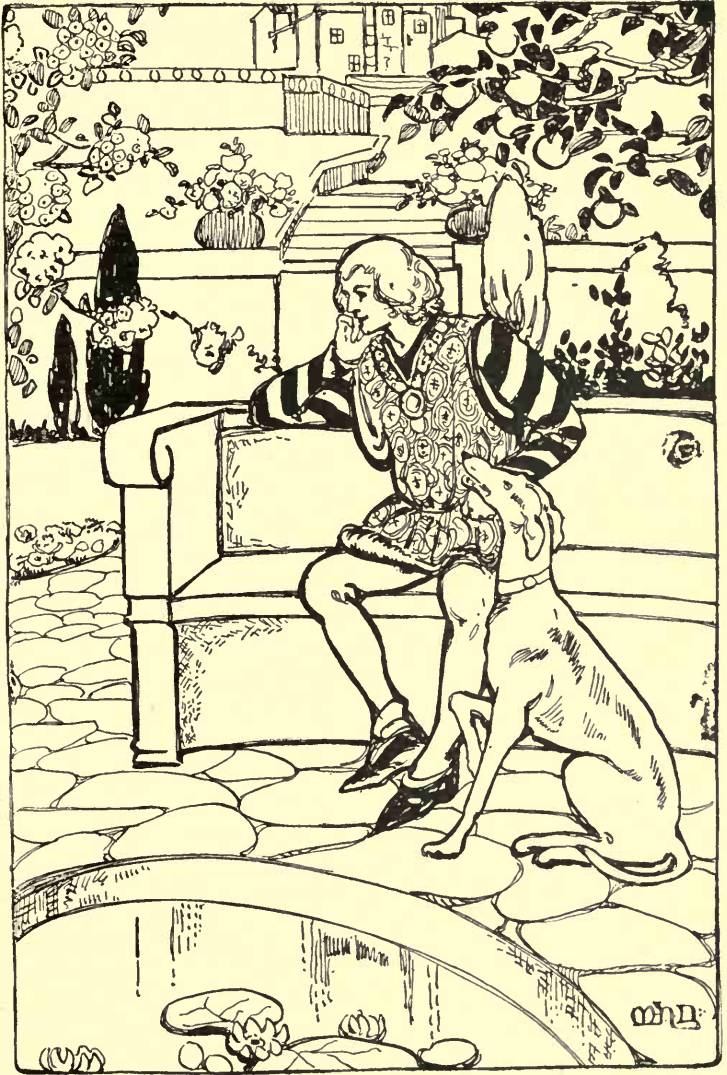
"Thank fortune that I am a fool," said Le Glorieux, "for who ever heard of a jester who was grave and ceremonious? But I shall be sad and mournful, my Princess, if you freeze up as you did just now, and continue to stay frozen."

"I must try to please my husband's people," replied Marguerite seriously. "If I am one day to be Queen of Spain I must learn to be like a Spanish woman. And I hope that my own people will not offend by showing too much levity and frivolity."

"One of your suite has become a thorough Spaniard," said Le Glorieux, "and that is Brutus. He follows the prince everywhere."

"Yes," replied Marguerite, "the prince loves him and Brutus is fond of his new master. In this he shows good judgment, for the prince is very, very good."

The princess sighed as she spoke and gazed



The Prince took a seat on a marble bench *Page 235*

AT THE SPANISH COURT

dreamily out of the window. "I wonder if she, too, is homesick," thought the jester. "Well, as for me, I have seen the bull-fights, the flowers, and oranges of Spain, and I wish I could take my little princess and go home to Max."

From the window they could see Prince Juan walking in the garden, and by his side stepped Brutus, the master occasionally pausing to pat the dog's head or to stroke his silky ears. "He is a good man," remarked the jester, "or Brutus would not be so fond of him."

Now the prince took a seat on a marble bench beside the fountain and turned his pale face, with its thoughtful brow, toward the sinking sun, still absently drawing the hound's ears through his thin white fingers. "I said something to him this morning that used to make the emperor laugh, but the prince only smiled in that far-off way, as if his mind were traveling through the moon," said Le Glorieux. "He is younger than Philibert, and Philibert is always ready to laugh. And how cheerful and gay Max always was, though sometimes——"

"Do not, oh, do not!" cried the princess. "Let us not talk of my father, or any of the people at home! I am going to weep; I shall be as tearful as poor Cunegunda," she went on, half-laughing, as she brushed the tears from her eyes. "What would her Majesty, Queen Isabella, say were she to see me weeping with my jester—she who always

THE COURT JESTER

is so careful never to betray her emotions, and who, even when she is ill, never utters a moan? The prince will come soon and we are to give an audience to some persons of distinction, and it will not do for me to be seen with swollen eyes."

"There, there," said the jester, taking her handkerchief and wiping her eyes as if she had been a little child. "Your lashes are long and thick, you see, and the tears hang to them and make them seem like more tears than they really are. They will spoil your pretty eyes. And you are not really sad, you know, for why should you be, when you will one day be queen of one of the great nations of the earth?"

"Somehow I do not care about that part of it, Le Glorieux, and I hope King Ferdinand and dear Queen Isabella will live to be very, very old. But I can be dignified when I like, can I not, Le Glorieux?"

"Most certainly you can, my little lady. That night when you were brought a prisoner before Anne of Brittany you were as dignified as a woman of forty."

"And as I grow older it will be easier for me to be silent and cold. I am only sixteen now."

"Of course it will be. The older people grow, the more silent and cold they are. That is to say, as a rule. Clotilde, now, is old and cold, but she is not always silent. There you are smiling, and your tears are all gone; do not get into the habit

AT THE SPANISH COURT

of weeping. As I understand it, you are expected neither to smile nor weep, but get into a humor half-way between the two and you will be just right."

"Le Glorieux," said the princess, "if you are not happy in Spain, there is no reason why you should stay here. I will send you home to my father, who will be glad to have you with him. You have plenty of friends there and you will be contented."

"And you would be willing to have me go, you could spare me, little Cousin?" asked the fool sadly.

"I am not thinking of myself. I should miss you sorely. But I want you to live where you will be happiest."

"Then that will be where you are, little Princess. No matter if Ferdinand commands me to be as sour and grave as one of the dried-up professors in the university, here do I remain."

Prince Juan entered. He bent gracefully and pressed Marguerite's fingers to his lips, then he offered his arm, and thus they left the room.

The jester wandered to the garden, where he remained for a long time on the seat vacated by the prince. He plucked a branch of pomegranate blossoms and fastened it to the front of his yellow coat. "Bright colors help to make one cheerful," murmured he, and rising, he went down to the river, and leaning over the old stone bridge, he

THE COURT JESTER

looked into the dingy waters. "They tell me that the waters of the Tormes River will make one forget all he knows if he drinks of them," thought the fool. "They have a saying here if any one forgets anything, 'He has been drinking of the waters of the Tormes.'" Twilight had closed in around him when he became conscious of some one standing beside him. It was a tall man in a long black cloak, and wearing a tall pointed black hat. He was very thin and his small eyes were like black beads.

"You were gazing into the waters of the Tormes, Señor," said the stranger, in a melancholy voice.

"If you are telling me that as a piece of news you must not mind if I am not surprised at it," replied the fool.

"Do you know the effect produced upon those who drink of this water, Señor?" asked the stranger, ignoring the flippancy of the jester's reply.

"Judging from the color of the water, I should say the effect would be gritty," replied Le Glorieux.

"They are the waters of oblivion," went on the tall man; "those who drink of them forget all they know."

"That would not be a great effort for some people," said Le Glorieux.

"One cup of this water and the past is completely forgotten," repeated the stranger.

AT THE SPANISH COURT

"Some people might be glad to forget their past," remarked the fool.

"But all wisdom is forgotten, too," the tall man urged in reply.

"Have you tried it?"

Without noticing the rather uncomplimentary character of this question, the stranger clutched the lower corner of his long mantle in his hand and folding his arms looked down into the river for a few minutes before he replied, "No, I have not tasted of these waters, for I need all of my wisdom. I am the most learned doctor of all the learned ones in the University of Salamanca."

"Retiring and modest of you to say so," replied the jester.

"The whole world has heard of Don Velerio de Farrapos," said that gentleman.

"Then I do not live in the world, for this is the first time I have heard that name."

"Do not lie to me," said the other, frowning, "you *have* heard it."

"Very well, if you insist upon it," said Le Glorieux. "In order to be easy and comfortable together, we will say that my father had a black cat of that name. But do not ask me to remember it, if you please. I already have the name of one Spaniard fixed in my mind, and I am not going to have it crowded out by yours. But what have you done that makes you talked about by all the world?"

THE COURT JESTER

"I have made a great discovery."

"What is it?"

"The elixir of life."

"You do not mean it?"

"The savants of the Orient," went on the Spaniard, "claimed that there are one hundred and one ways in which a man may lose his life. He may die by poison, by drowning, bad living, a stroke of lightning, or in ninety-six other ways. But if he dies before he is one hundred years old, it is the result of accident, or of his own ignorance or wilfulness. So you see it is not so very easy to die, when all is said and done."

"But you can not convince people of that; they will keep on dying," said the fool.

"But they need not, now that I have discovered the elixir of life," replied Don Velerio, in a deep voice.

Le Glorieux now surveyed him with a feeling of awe. Men were searching at this very time for the elixir of life, and why should it not have been discovered by this learned doctor of Salamanca?

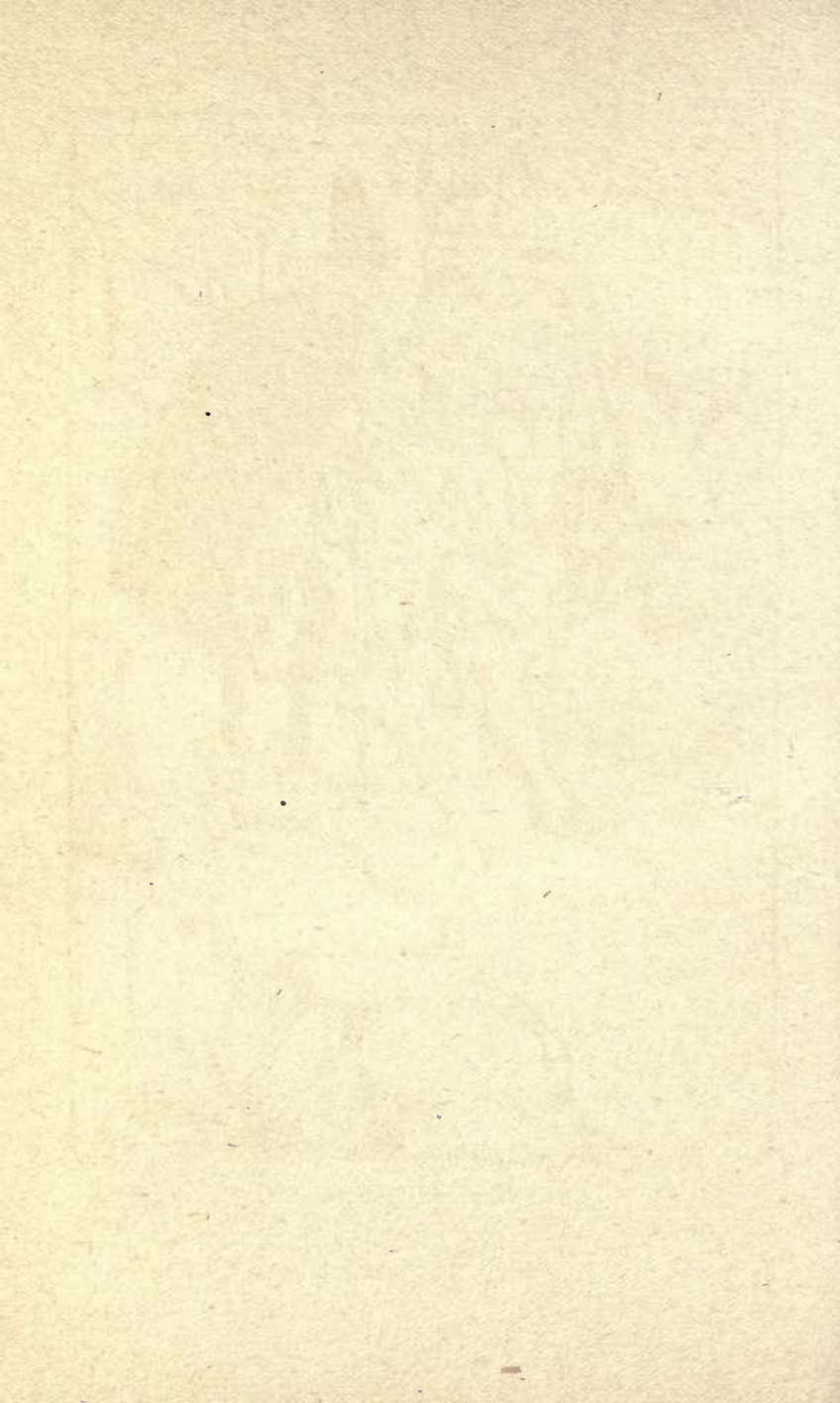
"It is only necessary to take it once in fifty years," observed Don Velerio carelessly.

"That seems a long while between doses," responded the fool. "But while you are about it, I should think you would add something to the medicine to put flesh on your bones," he continued, looking at Don Velerio's thin legs, which, clad in black hose, looked like slender iron rods.



"I have discovered the elixir of life"

Page 240



AT THE SPANISH COURT

"Flesh," said the learned man, "is nothing."

"It certainly is not much in your case," returned the jester.

"But life, life is everything," went on Don Velerio, waving the hand which still clutched the corner of the mantle, a gesture which gave him the appearance of a large bat. "I expect to live to the age of five thousand five hundred and fifty-seven years," said he.

"I am afraid you are just a trifle ambitious," said the jester.

"The composition of my elixir is a great secret," said the Spaniard. "It is made from serpents' broth," and he raised his voice exultantly.

"It must be a great secret since you bawl it out like that." Le Glorieux had now lost all faith in the wisdom of this "learned doctor."

"He doubts me! He dares to doubt me!" cried Don Velerio, in a shrill voice, and before he had time to realize what was happening, the jester was pushed over the low balustrade of the bridge and into the dark waters below, where he fell with a loud splash.

This piece of treachery on the part of Don Velerio would not have been a very serious matter, for the jester was a good swimmer, had not the victim of it struck an abutment of the bridge as he went down, which stunned him and prevented him from making any effort to save himself. He would have drowned had not two men in a rowboat not

THE COURT JESTER

far away succeeded in dragging the unconscious fool into their boat.

When he returned to his senses he was in his own room, and a nun, with a kind and gentle face, was sitting beside him.

"Why do you come here to watch me sleep?" he asked, and was surprised to find that his voice was so weak.

"You must be quiet; you have been very ill," said she.

"I ill? Now that is a queer thing, a very queer thing! What made me ill?"

"Do not trouble your head about it. It is best for you to remain perfectly silent."

"I will not be quiet until you have answered my questions. If anybody ought to be interested in this affair, it seems to me I ought to be the one."

The nun reflected a moment, then she said thoughtfully, "Perhaps it might be better to tell you, after all. You fell off of the bridge into the river. You were saved by two boatmen, but you seemed to be in a stupor."

"I remember all about it now," cried the jester. "It was that old black spider of a doctor who pushed me in. Let me up and I will break every bone in his body!"

The sister put her hand to his breast and pushed him back to his pillow again, and he was astonished to find how easily this delicate woman could man-

AT THE SPANISH COURT

age him. "You must not grow excited," she said gently.

"He came there and talked to me about his old elixir of life," said Le Glorieux. "Did it of his own accord; I never invited him; then he said I doubted him, which I did, and he pushed me over."

"Don Velerio is very sensitive about his discovery," said the nun, "but he did not intend really to harm you."

"He did a queer thing for a man who did not intend anything by it."

"Don Velerio is flighty at times, and he was sorry for what he had done. He has sent you a vial of his elixir of life."

"Send it straight back to him and tell him, with my compliments, to take it himself and see if it will make him——"

The door opened before he had finished the sentence, and the princess entered, followed by a page who bore a torch to light the way along the corridors. She was dressed as if for a grand fête. A coronet rested on her hair, gems flashed about her throat, her arms, and her slender waist. In all her gorgeous array she knelt on the floor and took in both her own the hand of the jester.

"Little Cousin," said he.

"Oh, he is conscious!" she cried. "I am so rejoiced to know it! Now you are going to recover right away, are you not, my poor Le Glorieux?"

THE COURT JESTER

"The sight of you, as you look now, ought to make even the broken statue of a man pull himself together," he replied, smiling faintly.

"Oh, it is so good to hear you talk," she exclaimed, laughing, though her eyes were full of tears.

"I did not know that it was so strange a thing to hear me talk," said he.

"Why, you have not said one word for more than two weeks!" she said impulsively. "But perhaps I ought not to have told you."

"I did not think it best to tell the patient too much, your Highness," said the nun almost reproachfully. "He seemed so anxious to talk that I allowed him to ask some questions, but I was just about to bid him be quiet when your gracious Highness entered the room."

"I am always blundering, even with you, Le Glorieux," said the princess, rising, "but now I will go. Try to sleep, try to get well as soon as possible. And now good-by for the present." She smiled down upon him, took her long train over her arm, and motioning to the page to open the door, went from the room.

"She is a great princess; she is the future Queen of Spain, yet she does not forget the poor jester," murmured the sick man, while to himself his words sounded as if they had been uttered by some one else and he seemed to sail away into a silent sea.

AT THE SPANISH COURT

When he once more became conscious the bright sun was streaming in at the open window, and standing beside his bed and looking down at him with coldly blinking eyes, was the Lady Clotilde.

"I thought I had died and gone to Heaven," said the jester weakly, "but this is only purgatory."

"I do not know that you ought to talk," said the Lady Clotilde. "I wish you had not returned to consciousness while Sister Barbara is out. I never know what to do with sick people."

"I have been talking all my life, and it has not killed me yet," said the jester.

"I came on behalf of her Highness, the Princess of the Asturias," said the Lady Clotilde. "Not being able to come in person, she sent me to see that you were well cared for and had everything that you needed."

"She was here last night," said he; "she said she was so glad to hear me talk again."

"Oh, that was some time ago. She has been here since, but you did not recognize her. You have been raving with fever for six weeks."

"Fever?" he asked, considerably puzzled. "Why, I thought I was pushed over a bridge."

"And so you were, but it terminated in a fever. The leeches do not know whether the accident brought on the fever, or whether the malady was already in your system. They have had several consultations about it."

"I do not see the sense of consulting about a

THE COURT JESTER

thing like that. What difference does it make what gave me the fever, since it is very evident that I have it? How long have I been here altogether?"

"Just eight weeks ago this night, for I remember I ordered a gown from the best tailor of Salamanca, and he promised it in a week, and it has not come yet, and it was the night of your accident, for I heard about it just as the tailor was leaving the palace, where he had come to take my order. Eight weeks, think of it, and that gown no nearer finished, I will warrant, than it was the day it was fitted! These Spanish tradesmen are the slowest people in this world." And the Lady Clotilde became very much excited about her wrongs.

"Well, I think that your situation was better than mine during those eight weeks," said the jester, "but I dare say I was in no higher fever than you were throughout that time. I do not suppose I have missed anything by being ill, except, perhaps, several dozen bull-fights. I would I were back in Vienna again," he continued, with a sigh.

"Vienna? I would not return there for the world," said the lady. "The climate of Spain is simply glorious."

"I am not especially fond of climate by itself," said the fool.

"I really do think you ought not to talk," said the Lady Clotilde. "I do wish you had not returned to consciousness while Sister Barbara is out."

AT THE SPANISH COURT

"You said that before," said the fool fretfully. "Why would it not be just as easy to wish that Sister Barbara had been in when I did return to consciousness?"

"I see that you are inclined to be captious," returned the Lady Clotilde calmly. "They say Prince Juan is like an angel."

"What has that to do with me?" asked Le Glorieux wearily. "He is not a near relative of mine."

"I forgot that you were ignorant of the fact that his Highness is very, very ill."

"Ill? His Highness ill?"

"Yes, he also has the fever, the same that you have, but the leeches are confident that they can cure him."

The fever had now spent itself, and Le Glorieux, being naturally of a strong constitution, made rapid progress toward recovery. Marguerite came no more, for every moment was spent beside the couch of the prince, who was making a brave fight for his life.

But one morning the bells began to toll, and it seemed as if a pall had settled over the land, for the Prince of the Asturias, the hope of Spain, was no more! The heir to the throne of a great kingdom had bowed his young head meekly to the divine will, and gladly had exchanged the splendors of earth for the joys of Heaven. History says, "All the nations mourned, and the court, instead of being hung with white serge, was draped in sack-

THE COURT JESTER

cloth. . . . Brutus, a beautiful hound belonging to the prince, could not be induced to leave his body, but went to his tomb and died there."

It was a pale and sorrowful queen whom Le Glorieux beheld when next he went to court. The fairy-like columns and sparkling fountains of her palaces were no longer a delight to Queen Isabella; for her the roses in the Alhambra gardens had lost their fragrance, and she thought with indifference of her new possessions across the sea, for she had lost the dearest treasure of all, and the great queen had become the sorrowing mother.

CHAPTER XIII

TRIPPING THE MEASURES OF THE EGG-DANCE

Ferdinand and Isabella were very kind to the young Princess of the Asturias, and insisted that she should remain with them. Some writers see a selfish motive in this invitation, saying that the royal couple feared to have Austria's daughter escape from their influence, that they wished to control her future, lest she should make a marriage directly opposed to the interests of Spain. But why not give them the credit of being really kind-hearted, and of wanting the society of the girl-widow, whom they must have loved for their son's sake if not for her own?

But Marguerite longed for her home and for her father, and one day Le Glorieux found her weeping in one of the myrtle walks of the Alcazar gardens. "You are crying in this beautiful twilight," said he, "when the nightingales are just beginning to sing, and you are close beside roses which could not be any redder and which have a fragrance that almost makes one drunk. Look at the goldfishes in that fountain, look at that tree loaded down with oranges, which, though they are of a kind that is not good to eat, make a fine show. Look through the trees at that beautiful

THE COURT JESTER

palace where you have but to utter a word and your wish is granted, and then have the heart to weep!"

But the princess continued to sob.

"We did not have half so many comforts in your father's empire," he went on. "The time we went to hunt the chamois with Max we found no luxuries in The Hunter's Rest. We were warm and comfortable and that was about all; all you could do was to run about with your ladies and work at your embroidery while the men hunted. Do you remember how gay Max was when he came back, and how he told about the chamois, and——"

"Oh, do not talk of it!" cried the princess, interrupting him. "Why must you make me more wretched than I was before you came?"

Cunegunda came along the walk with a mantilla of fine black lace over her arm; this she threw, Spanish fashion, over the head and shoulders of her young mistress. "You have been making her cry!" she said reproachfully, to the jester.

"That is a fine thing to say, when I have been talking myself hoarse to keep her from crying! But, of course, you always blame me with everything."

"You were making her cry; I heard you, and I heard what she said," insisted the woman. "You were talking about the inn in the Tyrol."

"I do not deny it. I did it for the purpose of contrast. Think of that mean little inn and the

THE EGG-DANCE

cold snow, then think of this marble palace and these flowers.”

“If one is right on the inside, it does not much matter what is on the outside,” replied the woman. “When the heart is comfortable everything is bright to the eyes.”

“You do not weep as much as you used to do, Cunegunda,” said the jester, looking at her thoughtfully. “Even the sight of me does not make you cry any more.”

“I control my tears for the sake of my young mistress, who weeps so much,” returned Cunegunda with dignity.

“You have some good points, I must say,” replied the fool.

The princess had now dried her eyes, and had drawn the folds of the mantilla closer about her face. “I want to go home,” said she. “All of my ladies and gentlemen want to go home. They hate the restraint of the Spanish court; and I want to see my father.”

“This is the first time I have mentioned it,” said the fool, “but I also want to go home. I want to see Max and I want to see that little wretch of an Antoine, and Pittacus, and Pandora.”

“And we will go,” cried Marguerite, rising to her feet with a new light sparkling in her eyes. “I will write to the emperor, my father, at once, and we will set out at the earliest possible moment.”

And again did the daughter of Maximilian re-

THE COURT JESTER

turn to him, still only a princess, for it was destined that she should never wear the crown of a queen. But when she beheld her native land, and the handsome, kindly face of her father once more, she was as happy as one whose most ambitious dreams had been realized.

Le Glorieux said, "At last we really have left Clotilde behind, and as Don Geronimo Bartolomeo Zurriago y Escafusa says he never will go out of his native land again, we may safely conclude that Clotilde is a fixture in Spain." The jester was affectionately embraced by Antoine, who declared himself overjoyed to see his old friend again, but their master was disgusted to find that Pandora and Pittacus received him with their usual cold indifference.

One day, in the following spring time, Marguerite said to Le Glorieux:

"Cunegunda is once more suffering from migraine, and thinks that nothing will cure her but another pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Roch. She thinks that when she was there before she did not give enough time to her prayer, being in too great haste to leave; otherwise she would have been cured permanently. I am often depressed and weary, and I think the journey will benefit me. So I shall go with such of my household as I shall need."

"It is a long journey to make for Cunegunda's sake," observed the jester.

THE EGG-DANCE

"Cunegunda has been one of my best friends throughout my life," replied the princess, "so why should I not strive to please her? But as I said before, it is not altogether upon her account that I want to go. I wish to be taken out of myself. The world is not so happy a place as it used to be."

"Little Cousin, I do not often ask a favor of you, do I?" asked the fool.

"No, Le Glorieux, a fact which would make me the more inclined to grant you one now."

"I want you to let me have a man and a horse," he replied.

"For what purpose?"

"I wish to send a message to the young Duke of Savoy. He lost a valuable jewel when he was with us, and I want to tell him where he can find it."

"Perhaps it is between the leaves of his prayer-book," said the princess, smiling. "But if you have an idea where this wonderful jewel is, why can you not find it and send it to him?"

"There are certain reasons why such an act on my part would be out of the question," returned the jester. "But if you do not want to let me have the man and the horse, we will say nothing more about it."

"I do not object in the least, Le Glorieux. Send as many messengers as you like to Savoy."

They set out from the historic city of Aix-la-Chapelle, where the court was staying at the time, and even at the end of the first day's travel the

THE COURT JESTER

princess expressed herself as being wonderfully benefited with the journey.

Late on the following afternoon as they approached a hostelry where they expected to stay the night, they noticed a queer-looking animal painted on the sign-board and before they were sufficiently near to read the name beneath it, they began to speculate as to what it could be.

"I should say it was a horse," said the princess.

"And I," said the jester, who rode at her side, "should call it a calf in convulsions."

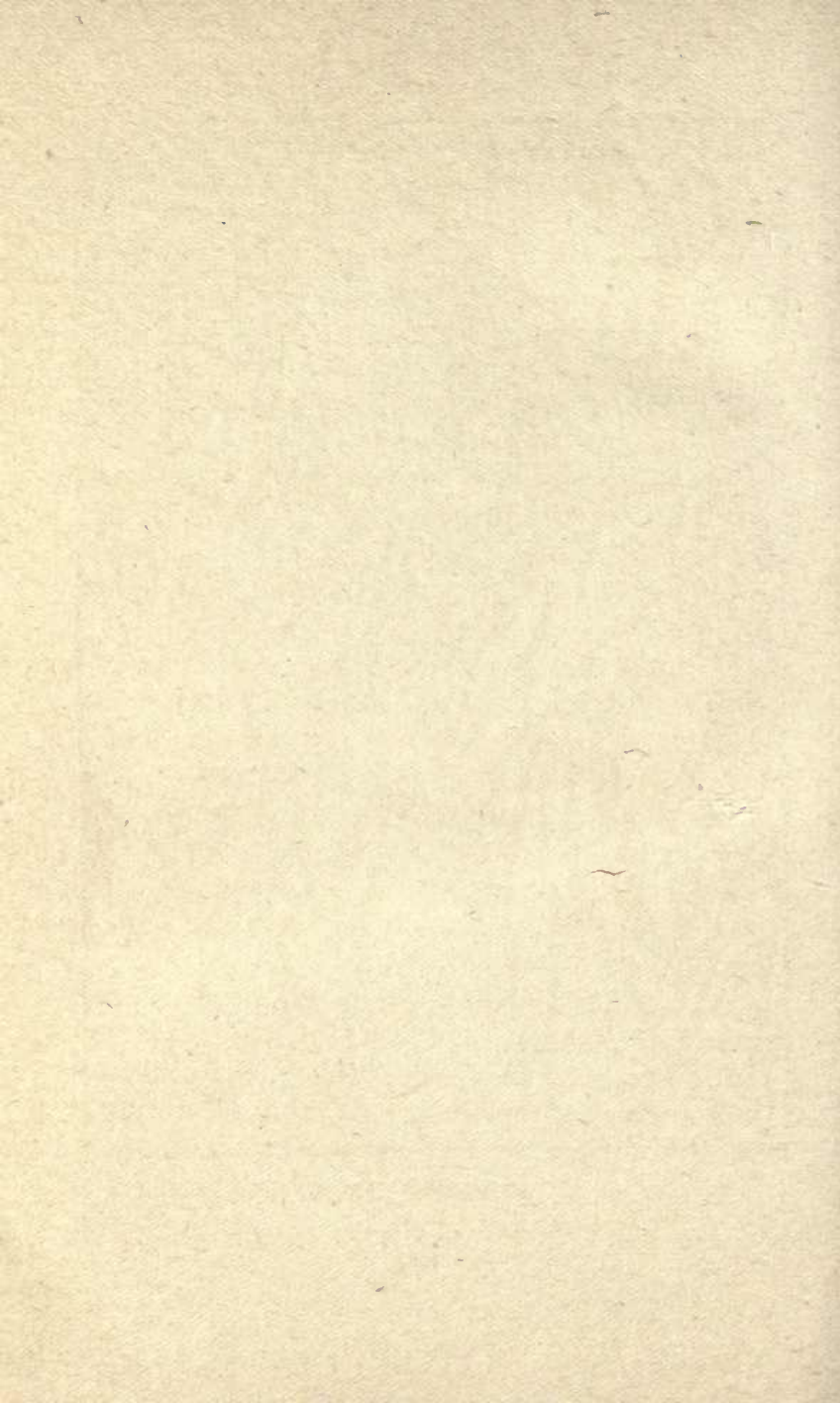
Coming nearer they read the sign, which was "The Flying Fawn." So many things had happened since she had heard the name that the princess had forgotten it, but as they drew up and the pretty landlady came to the door, Le Glorieux exclaimed, "Cimburga!"

Yes, it was Frau Obermeister, as Cimburga was now called, and she was followed by her tall husband, both almost doubting the evidence of their senses when they beheld the princess. Even before the latter alighted from her mule Cimburga ran out and was about to press the hem of Marguerite's robe to her lips when the princess reached out her hand, which the landlady kissed, saying, "Oh, gracious lady, I never have forgotten your face, which is now more beautiful than ever. And never have I ceased to offer the prayer I told you of, and my little daughter, although she can scarcely lisp the words, offers petitions to the Blessed Virgin for



They approached a hostelry

Page 254



THE EGG-DANCE

your health and happiness, for she has learned that it is to your goodness that we owe all that we now have."

"Happiness is a strange thing," remarked Le Glorieux afterward to Cimburga. "You and Karl living in this snug inn, with your two chubby children, have plenty of it, while the Lady Marguerite, even when she wedded the Prince of the Asturias, had not found it."

"It will yet come to her; she is still very young, and my prayers will be answered," replied Cimburga simply.

Castle Hohenberg was a good many miles north of The Flying Fawn, but Cimburga had heard one piece of news from that hospitable household which, when she told it to him, surprised the fool greatly. The seneschal had married the housekeeper shortly after the visit of the emperor.

"I can not believe it!" cried Le Glorieux. "Why, those two were always quarreling!"

"And so they were," she agreed, "but now, I am told, they never speak an unpleasant word to each other."

Speaking of this marriage to his mistress, when they had resumed their journey, the jester said, "For a couple who were ready to scratch each other's eyes out before marriage, to be perfectly angelic afterward, is nothing less than a miracle."

She replied, "Hohenberg is the place for miracles. Think of Saint Monica."

THE COURT JESTER

"Which was not a miracle, after all," replied the fool; and then he told her the truth regarding that night's strange occurrence, as it had been related to him by Philibert, adding, "He did it because you had prayed for her, little Cousin."

It was, as the jester had said, a long journey, but at length they reached the end of it, and Cunegunda made frequent visits to the shrine of Saint Roch, declaring even after the first one that the pain was much less severe than it had been.

Everything about the old inn was much as it had been at their first visit, though the little Mary had become a great chatterbox, and this time was able to thank the princess for the present of a gold piece.

Anne, the queen-duchess, was staying for a time in one of her castles in the province of Brittany, it being her custom to visit her domain as often as she could make it convenient to do so. Hearing of the presence at the inn of the Princess of the Asturias, she sent to her an invitation, offering the hospitality of her roof for the Easter season. Although the King of France and the Emperor of Austria had been enemies, the princess and the queen had not shared the ill feeling, and history, which as a rule makes out people to have been worse than they really were, admits that the two ladies ever were friendly to each other and that they sometimes exchanged presents.

The King of France was away with his soldiers,

THE EGG-DANCE

and as the royal little ones had remained in the palace of Amboise, it was not difficult to imagine that time had remained stationary and that the fair châtelaine of the castle was still simply the Lady Anne, Duchess of Brittany.

Fêtes and entertainments were arranged in honor of the guest, and happy were the hours that Anne and Marguerite spent together.

On Easter Monday the people for miles around met in the valley to engage in the customary games of the season. The married men entertained themselves with archery, the prize for the best shot being considered worth winning. The archers shot at a cask of wine, and he who was so fortunate as to pierce the wood was permitted to put his lips to the aperture thus made, and to drink of the amber liquid until he was satisfied, the others taking their turn when he had finished. But the young people craved something more exciting than the mere drinking of wine, and their gay laughter rang out joyously and vigorously as they went through their native dances.

The princess from her place beside her royal hostess enjoyed the scene thoroughly. Finally began the most exciting dance of the day. A hundred eggs were scattered over the ground and two youths chose their partners and began the figure. Although on the surface a trivial matter and one to provoke laughter, this dance was a very serious affair to those who engaged in it; for the couple

THE COURT JESTER

who could skip over the eggs, glide between them, twirl about them in the many turns required by the dance, without breaking or cracking an egg, might marry each other in spite of the opposition of parents or guardians. Each couple was allowed three trials, and the dance being successfully concluded, none had a right to say "Nay" to the union.

While the merrymaking was at its height the sound of a hunter's horn was heard ringing through the forest, and soon there appeared a company of men on horseback and in brilliant uniforms. At their head rode a beautiful youth attired in the rich costume affected by the nobles of the time, who, leaping from his horse, bent a graceful knee to the queen, requesting her hospitality. It was granted at once, for this was Philibert the Handsome, Duke of Savoy!

He bowed low before the princess and gave a friendly greeting to the others, but to Le Glorieux he murmured, "The jewel about which you wrote me I have come to claim."

The dance, which had ceased when the hunters appeared upon the scene, was now resumed with greater merriment than before, and after watching them intently for a while Marguerite said wistfully, "Would that I might try that dance."

Then Philibert once more inclined his graceful figure and said, "Madame, will you permit me to be your partner?"

This was equivalent to an offer of marriage, and



The Princess placed her hand in his Page 259

THE EGG-DANCE

his followers and her own became wildly enthusiastic. Cries were heard of "Austria and Savoy!" and it seemed to Le Glorieux that in his joy his own cry must have rung to the very skies, while cheer upon cheer rent the air.

The princess placed her hand in his and the comely pair took their places. There was a serious task before them. They must dance around and over and between those eggs without breaking any, and that, too, with many eyes intently watching them. The members of noble families were accustomed to dance; the little feet of the lady could poise as lightly as thistle-down, while the knight was graceful in every step. When the dance was ended not a single egg had been touched!

Exercise in the open air had deepened the tint on the cheek of the princess. Philibert bent his head and whispered something in her ear.

"Yes," said she, smiling brightly, "let us follow the custom of the country."

"Philibert has found his jewel," said Le Glorieux, "and I have helped him to get it."

"What jewel do you mean?" asked the princess.

"What should I mean, but yourself, fair lady? You are the jewel he always has admired. I am nothing but a fool, but I am not blind."

One year from that day the two were married. To their guests they gave as souvenirs gold and silver eggs filled with spices, which they called Easter eggs, and which the natives of Savoy claim

THE COURT JESTER

was the origin of the pleasant custom of giving eggs at that season.

And Philibert and Marguerite never had occasion to regret that happy day in the forest, when, forgetting everything save that their hearts were beating with the joy of youth, they together tripped the measures of the egg-dance.

THE END

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

APR 05 1990
REC'D LRL
ILL- Coalinga
MAY 01 1990

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 051 894 4

[Handwritten signature]

